

convergence

Africa

Americas

Asia

Oceania



Sinta Ridwan
To Take Space

Sculptural Pipes in the Mississippian World
Displaying Indian Religious Figures in Museums

Kanak Coins
Nikorima

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Sculptural Pipes and Sacred Materials in
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Mississippian artist, "Big Boy" pipe
© courtesy of the University of Arkansas Museum Collections



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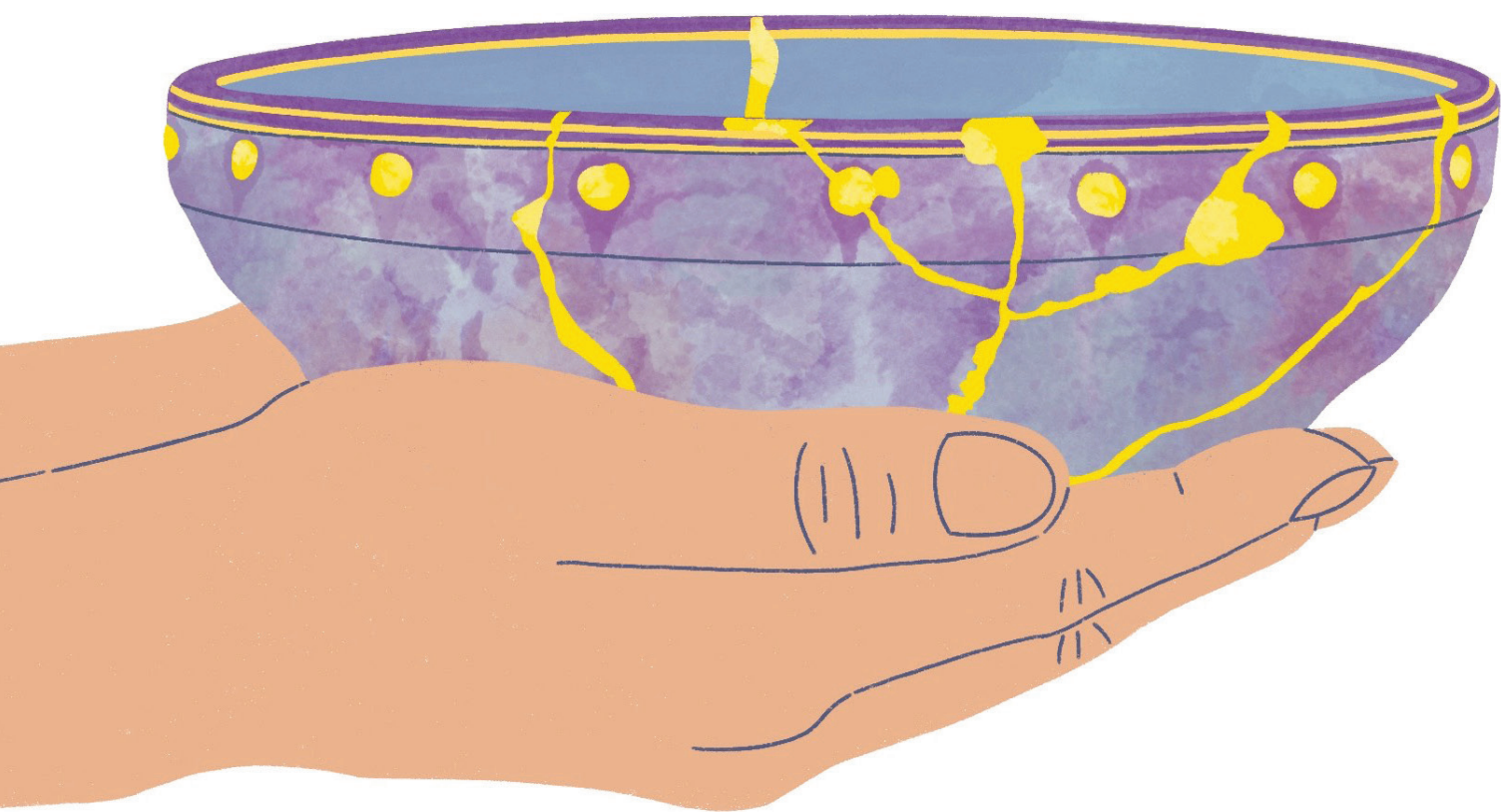


Illustration by Carol Rodríguez for Convergence
© Carol Rodríguez

foreword

In a *kintsugi* repair, an ancestral restoration technique from Japan, a mixture of lacquer and gold is poured into the grooves of a broken object, similar to how water flows over a wound to wash it. This metallic vein comes to adorn the fracture, a reminder of the past, showing that injury can yield life. The history of the repaired object is now marked by this golden scar at the very location where the restoration seals its renewal. This is the philosophy that inspires Convergence.

In the manner of *kintsugi*, Convergence seeks to gather the fragments of different objects whose edges coincide more often than one might think. With Convergence, we want to bring to light objects and cultures with complex, tumultuous, and sometimes conflicting histories, because what they tell us is worth knowing. Our wish is to put in dialogue views and histories so that they respond and complement each other. We want members of Indigenous communities, academics, artists, activists, professionals from the art and museum worlds, and many others to bring their own perspective to the magazine, which will showcase the fruit of their reflection.

“In the manner of *kintsugi*, Convergence seeks to gather the fragments of different objects whose edges coincide more often than one might think.”

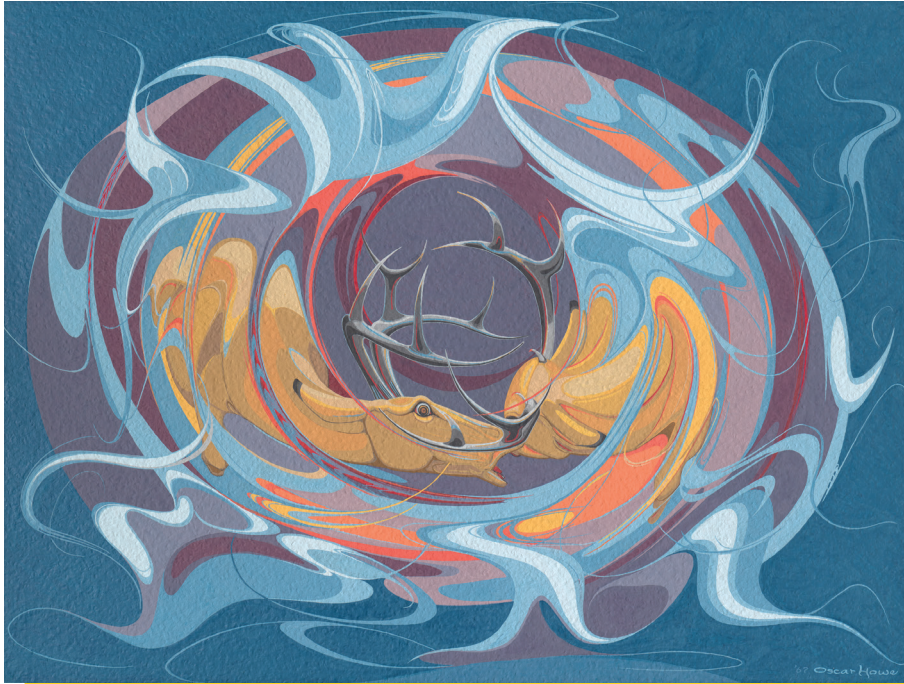
We have at heart to put forward the arts from five immense continents, striving to showcase all their diversity. We hope that the meeting of these traditions will allow us to apprehend approaches, technologies, and knowledge coming from all the cultures and populations represented in our pages. All of them bring their own way of perceiving the world beyond the dominant patterns of thought. May this project be a free and considerate platform for multiple points of view and new perspectives.

Our journey has no set route. Walker, there is no path, the path is made by walking, wrote the Spanish poet Antonio Machado.

Agathe Torres & Louise Deglin

calendar

Oscar Howe, *Fighting Bucks*, 1967.
NMAI (27/0217)



"Dakota Modern: The Art of Oscar Howe"
National Museum of the American
Indian, New York (USA)
March 11–September 11, 2022

A FAVORITE

Oscar Howe (1915–1983) was a Yanktonai Dakota artist that revolutionized Native American painting in the mid-century by combining Indigenous traditions with an innovative artistic approach. Although meticulously drafted on paper, Howe's paintings are incredibly dynamic, evoking movement through plunging perspectives and psychedelic waves. This captivating survey exhibition will also be on view at the Portland Art Museum (October 29, 2022–May 14, 2023) and at the South Dakota Art Museum at South Dakota State University (June 10–September 17, 2023).



Also Known As Africa

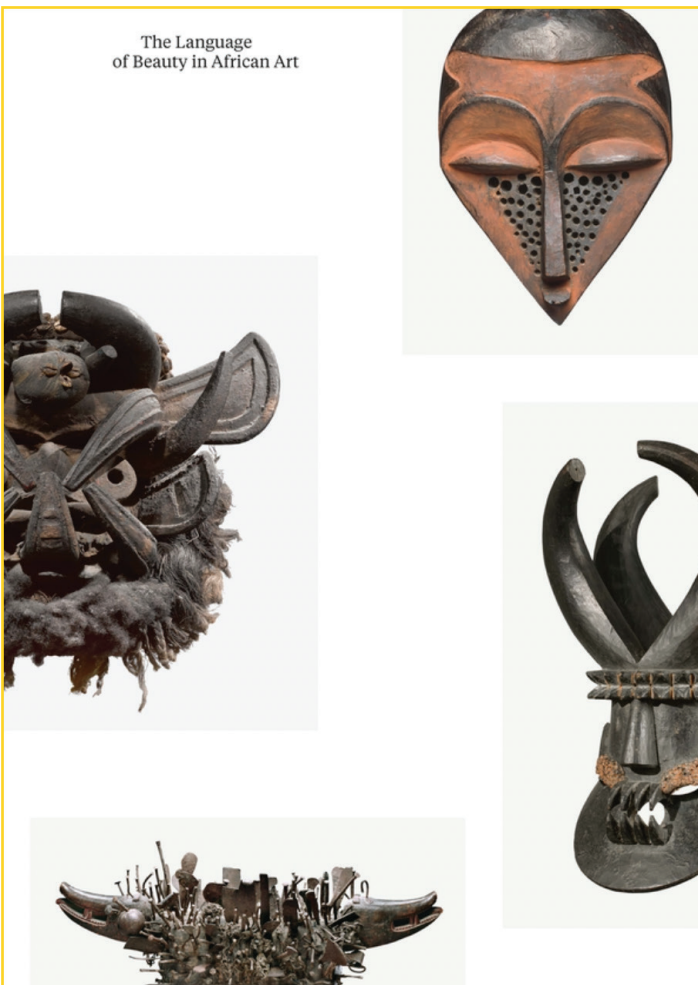
Also Known As Africa
Contemporary African art fair
Carreau du Temple, Paris (France)
October 21–23, 2022

Japanese artist(s), Fireman's
short coat, late 19th century.
Minneapolis Institute of Art
(2019.91.27.1)



"Dressed by Nature: Textiles of Japan"
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis (USA)
June 25–September 11, 2022

*The Language
of Beauty in African Art*



A FAVORITE

It is no news that African art came to be collected and appreciated in the so-called West based on European standards which had little to no consideration for indigenous conceptions of value and beauty. This publication, together with the exhibition it accompanies, endeavors to reassess the aesthetic concerns behind these works following local understandings within their communities of origin.

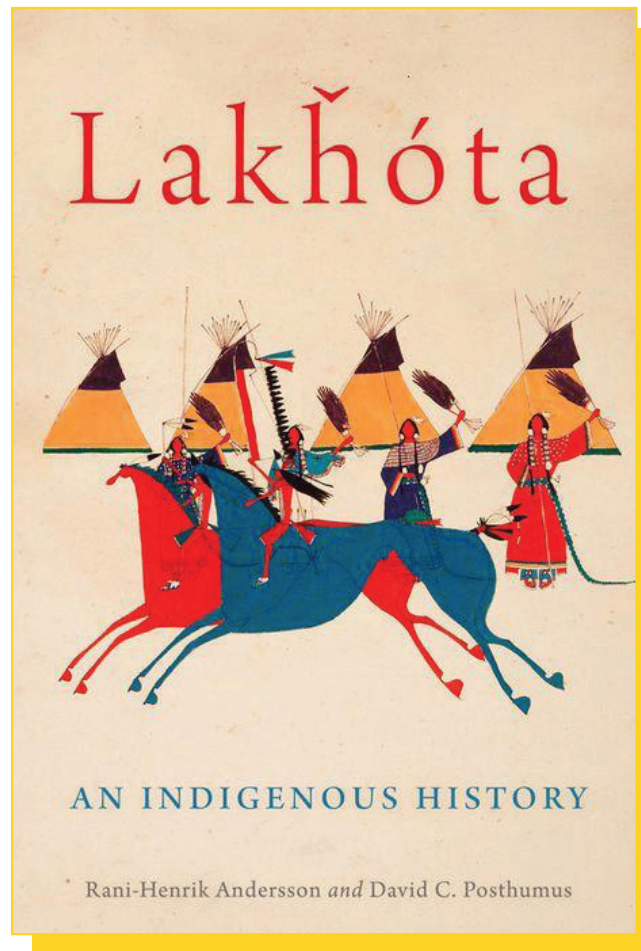
The Language of Beauty in African Art

Constantine Petridis (ed.), Yaelle Biro, Herbert M. Cole, Kassim Kone,
Babatunde Lawal, Wilfried van Damme, and Susan Mullin Vogel.
Yale University Press, April 2022

Lakshota: An Indigenous History
Rani-Henrik Andersson and David C. Posthumus
University of Oklahoma Press, November 2022

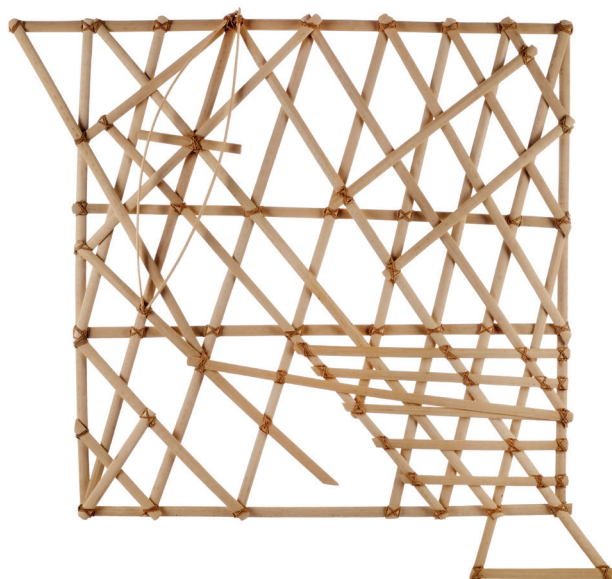
A FAVORITE

In today's extremely polarized climate, one issue affects us all: the environmental crisis. Here, the Musée d'ethnographie turns to Indigenous peoples from around the globe, who not only have a deep knowledge of the environment, but are also the first victims of ecological disasters. Through their work, these artists advocate for land stewardship and a respectful and reciprocal relationship with our ecosystem.



"Injustice environnementale : alternatives autochtones" Musée d'ethnographie de Genève,
Geneva (Switzerland)
September 24, 2021–August 21, 2022

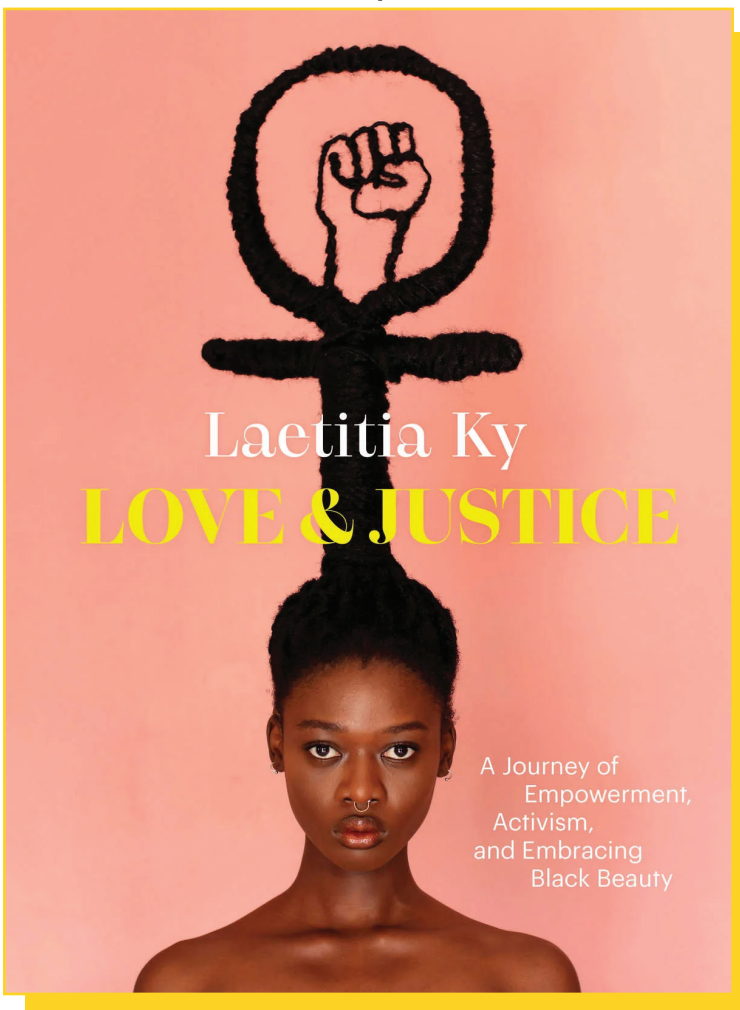
Alson Kelen and the Waan Aelōñ in Majel Association Marshallese, Marshall Islands,
Rebbelib navigation chart, Majuro 2021.
MEG Inv. ETHOC 068774 © MEG, J. Watts



*Love & Justice: A Journey of Empowerment,
Activism, and Embracing Black Beauty*

Laetitia Ky

Princeton Architectural Press, April 2022



A FAVORITE

Artist, activist, and social media influencer Laetitia Ky has gathered over 6 million followers on TikTok. Her hair sculptures speak beyond words by embracing such a strong symbol of Black beauty in a way that is simple yet unprecedented. The artist, who recently represented the Ivory Coast at the Venice Biennale, literally carries her fight for social justice on her shoulders.

Aïcha Snoussi, workshop view, 2021.
Engraved bone on cellular concrete
© Lionel Roche



"Réclamer la Terre"
Palais de Tokyo, Paris (France)
April 15–September 4, 2022



"Where the Waters Come Together"
 Center for Native Arts & Cultures, Portland (USA)
 April 22–June 30, 2022

A FAVORITE

This inaugural exhibition of the Center for Native Arts and Culture in Portland gathers Indigenous artists from North America as well as Hawai'i around the theme of water and the ocean, from its access to its preservation.

Tola Odukoya, Fela with his trumpet, c. 1966
 © Tola Odukoya



"Fela Kuti: Rébellion Afrobeat"
 Musée de la musique, Paris (France)
 October 20, 2022–June 11, 2023



Jonathan Christensen Caballero, *Golden Child/Niño Dorado*, 2020
© Jonathan Christensen Caballero

"The Regional"
Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art,
Kansas City (USA)
June 3–September 11, 2022

Nancy Friedemann–Sánchez,
Saltatrás, 2017



A FAVORITE

Casta paintings were a genre developed in Latin America by European colonizing powers to categorize, and consequently stigmatize, children born of parents of diverse ancestry. In her own version, Nancy Friedemann–Sánchez depicts crude patchworks as bodies to illustrate the racial stereotypes that continue to plague most of the Americas today.

"Nancy Friedemann–Sánchez: Pinturas de Casta and the Construction of American Identity"
Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, Charleston (USA)
May 13–July 16, 2022



Hsu Yung-hsu, *2019-13*, 2020
Porcelain with white clay, 108x68 cm
Photo: Victoria Lee

in conversation

Victoria Lee is a ceramicist and sculptor from Taiwan. For *Convergence*, she converses with Xiaohan Du, a postdoctoral fellow in the Asian art department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), about a work by Taiwanese artist Hsu Yung-hsu.

V.L.: For the sculptor, the process of making an object is as important as the final outcome, if not more. Here, the artist repeats the motion of pressing his thumb into the malleable clay to register the human force. Ultimately, these thumb imprints add up into the sculpture in its present form. It is a very physical process.

X.D.: This build-up of layers also registers the accumulation of time. In contrast to the deliberately additive process of the sculptor impressing his thumb on the clay, the sculpture has a deeply organic appearance inspired by features that one encounters in nature. The repetition of its form is reminiscent of the slow mineralization of a coral reef.

V.L.: Yet, this work is dynamic. It contacts and interacts with the space around it. It was also made to an almost human scale, which is reinforced by its vertical orientation. This makes the experience of the work quite intimate.

X.D.: The end result is so utterly alien. Hsu works with a very traditional medium in East Asian art—porcelain—but the final form somehow does not reveal any explicit connection to that history. This raises the eternal question for art historians: in art, is there continuity between past and present?

BEST PRAC TICE

Giving Back | *Community Projects and Restitution in the Pacific Northwest*

Donald Ellis, a renowned Canadian art dealer who founded his gallery of historical Native American art almost five decades ago, has long been confronting issues that plague the art market. Nowadays, he dedicates his time to supporting individuals and projects that contribute to Indigenous stewardship of land, art, traditions, knowledge, and language.

Devoted to offering artworks from the Yup'ik, Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian and other Indigenous nations for sale, the Donald Ellis Gallery began in what was very much a niche market in the 20th century. Based in Canada and the United States, the gallery quickly diversified its activities to undertake more public-facing initiatives that could reach a wider audience, such as publications and exhibitions for non-specialists. Through these endeavors, the art dealer aimed to showcase the creativity and dexterity so vividly manifested by Native North American artists. Focusing on letting the works speak for themselves, Ellis has always avoided an anthropological approach to historical Indigenous arts, instead centering on the visual and material qualities of the objects on display.

From his interactions with visitors and careful observation of museum crowds, Ellis got to witness how art can change people's perspective of Native American cultures and populations, in particular in places that lack—or lacked at the time—a strong Indigenous presence. The encounter of both Native and non-Native people with these objects was impactful, provoking sensations of pride, respect, wonder, and fascination, sometimes even bringing people to tears. According to Ellis, the powerful face-to-face between people and objects is an opportunity to open conversations, even in today's polarized climate.



Philanthropism came organically following these experiences with the general public. Ellis wanted to give back to the people whose ancestors made the art that captivated him. Disappointed by the lack of dialogue between the art market, academia, and museums in the field of Indigenous arts, Ellis gradually stepped away from the world of “fine arts” in favor of community-oriented enterprises to further his goal. This transition materialized in two ways: on one hand, by donating artworks he owned to groups and institutions by offering support for the restitution of Indigenous cultural heritage to descendant communities, and, on the other hand, by helping finance Indigenous-led projects beyond the art world.

The initiatives backed by Ellis stem from personal relationships woven over the years with a variety of artists, elders, knowledge-keepers, and professionals. Rather than making unilateral decisions, his philanthropic pursuits are the product of thoughtful conversations with committed Indigenous leaders and practitioners. For example, Dana Claxton, renowned Lakota artist and head of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia (UBC), was a key instigator of the Beau Dick scholarship, a \$20,000 award established in memory of the eminent Kwakwaka'wakw wood carver Beau Dick (1955-2017). This scholarship, which aims to support a Kwakwaka'wakw female student, is one of two funded at UBC by the art dealer, together with the Donald Ellis scholarship in Art History, Visual Art and Theory.

Charles Edenshaw, Haida (attributed to), Chief Shake's Bracelet, c. 1890-1910
Donated to the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver (Canada).
© Donald Ellis Gallery

Over the last few years, the Donald Ellis Gallery has been collaborating with the Haida Gwaii Museum (British Columbia), one of the first Indigenous-run and -owned cultural institutions in Canada, that spearheaded the restitution of Haida remains and objects under the leadership of museum director Nika Collison. In 2019 and 2021, the art dealer also helped to reconstitute a Sun Mask and a Kwakwaka'wakw architectural house plank to the U'mista Cultural Center in Alert Bay (British Columbia). More recently, through a combination of donations and sales, Ellis transferred his personal collection of artworks from the Pacific Northwest to the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), an institution which made the largest acquisition of historical Indigenous art in the history of Canada last year and hired a number of Indigenous administrative and curatorial staff around this topic.

Since the pandemic, Ellis has been involved in a manifold project close to his heart: Nawalakw, a Kwakwaka'wakw land-based healing, cultural, and language center nestled in the ethereal Great Bear

rainforest (British Columbia). Dedicated to protecting local traditions and promoting food and land sovereignty, Nawalakw will bring stable employment to the region in addition to teaching younger generations about their Kwakwaka'wakw heritage.

The culminating point of Donald Ellis' journey will come true in the upcoming years, with his gallery ceasing its commercial activities to become a foundation. While not pretending to set an example, Ellis hopes that the activities of the soon-to-be foundation will encourage other art dealers and professionals to develop projects and personal relationships that engage respectfully with descendant communities. Through its ever-evolving trajectory, the Donald Ellis Gallery demonstrates that the art market and activism are, indeed, compatible enterprises. Efforts can continuously be made at the individual and collective level to listen, learn from, communicate with, and help finance Indigenous projects for a more diverse and just future.

Louise Deglin

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Kwakwaka'wakw artist, Sun Mask, c. 1880
Donated to the U'mista Cultural Center in Alert Bay (Canada).
© Donald Ellis Gallery



CORPUS



BOOK REVIEW

Corpus: Kukuli Velarde

Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art,
College of Charleston. Charleston, South
Carolina (United States), 2022.

Corpus: the body. In the art of Kukuli Velarde, clay becomes flesh.

Corpus: a collection of works. Here, a coherent ensemble of fifteen clay effigies that took over a decade to complete.

Corpus: Christi. One of the most important religious celebrations in Christianity. In this case, Velarde constructs her own Corpus Christi procession with saint-like ceramics, each accompanied by its own banner.

A necessary complement to the exhibition, the catalog of the traveling show “Kukuli Velarde: Corpus” unveils various facets of the Peruvian artist's work in a compelling assemblage of texts, interviews, photographs, and a letter from Velarde's own mother. As Tey Marianna Nunn, Director of the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, accurately writes, Velarde's creations are “intricately layered in meaning and message.” In this publication, the authors give clues to access each of these levels of information, from photographs of Indigenous Andean ceramics that inspired Velarde's work to an introduction to the Corpus Christi celebration in Cusco, Peru.

Each object that composes *Corpus* is illustrated in the catalog at least five times, providing the reader with different angles and detailed shots, critical to render on paper the three-dimensionality and subtlety of these ceramics. As we turn the pages, we discover that all textures, volumes, and design features in Velarde's works were carefully, if not painstakingly, planned. Hence, what the reader loses in terms of the tangible experience of seeing the exhibition in person, they gain in additional viewpoints and close-up observation. For example, the photographs reveal how Velarde imitated on ceramic the cracks of gold paint visible on 17th- and 18th-century Christian wooden sculptures, or how she mimicked the red color of Armenian bole, the base layer onto which metal leaf was applied on Baroque works.

Far more than a meticulous juxtaposition of artworks from the Andes, *Corpus* materializes long-lasting racial, social, religious, and cultural frictions in the region. In her interview with Katie Hirsch, Director of the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, the artist reminds us that, in Peru, "racism has remained as a tool of oppression and exploitation." Velarde's saintly effigies conjure up this tension through a complex system of gazes, gestures, complexions, positions, and attributes, echoing how, in her own mother's words, "syncretism saved the day, with an interesting variety of nuances." By naming the Indigenous groups which produced the ceramics she references, Velarde manages to showcase *Corpus* as both personal and collective—the result of her heritage.

Louise Deglin



A COFFEE WITH



SINTA RIDWAN





We met Sinta Ridwan over Zoom, between Paris and Jakarta. Ridwan is an Indonesian philologist and archaeologist who works for the recognition of the Hindu and Buddhist historical heritage in Indonesia, and for the opening of her disciplines to new horizons. While working on her Ph.D., she participates in a multitude of projects, from a documentary series to a fashion line and gaming. Education and female empowerment are at the heart of her practice. Ridwan represents, in a way, a new generation of researchers leaning into creating innovative ways to share culture and heritage.

You describe yourself as a philologist. Can you tell us more about this science, and how it fits in with archaeology?

Philology is the study of languages and writings. At the time, when I was beginning my studies fifteen years ago, the discipline of philology was merely burgeoning in Indonesia. Very few universities offered training in this field, which is why I had to go to Bandung University, in West Java. I actually gambled in order to decide among philosophy, literature, anthropology, archeology, and philology for my career, and philology came out. After studying philology in college, I went on to be trained in archeology as philologists limit themselves to examining manuscripts and other documentary sources. I personally wanted to study other types of inscriptions such as the ones etched in stone and metal, and sometimes on architecture. The two disciplines are inseparable in a way: archeology represents the material part of the study, and philology, the literary one.

What attracted you to these fields and to these arts in the first place? What feeds your professional practice today?

I fell in love with philology because of *aksara*, an Indonesian script that comes from an Indian one (the *brahmi*) and was adopted in Indonesia during the Hindu and Buddhist period, at the beginning of the common era. I always had an interest in studying Indonesian manuscripts and writings myself

because so many specialists are foreigners rather than locals. For example, there is a philologist at the British Library who is an expert on Malay manuscripts, while others from the Netherlands and Australia are highly skilled in the old Javanese language and script. There is a Batak script specialist who teaches in Hawai'i. There are languages and manuscripts that are not being studied by skilled Indonesian experts. A lot of Indonesian manuscripts are also located abroad at the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* in Paris, The British Library in London, and Leiden University in the Netherlands, among others. Overall, there are very few experts in this field in Indonesia. I thought there was a change to be made.

The lack of specialists is in part due to the fact that languages in Indonesia are very diverse, with many regional dialects that vary across time and space. In Indonesia, there are around 700 local languages, and about 40 different types of *aksara* script. They can be found painted in ancient manuscripts, but also carved on buildings and as inscriptions on objects. They are part of Indonesian traditions where they are omnipresent. Another issue is that most existing studies consist exclusively of translations of ancient inscriptions rather than in-depth analyses of these texts that may be of interest to the general public. Texts are used to study history. And today, only around ten Indonesian texts, out of thousands, if not millions, are used for philological research.

I started studying Indonesian writings because they are part of my country's history. I want to be able to see what lies beneath them: questions of economics, politics, religion, and more. As both a philologist and an archaeologist, I think that we need to study a larger corpus of evidence to expand our understanding of Indonesia's past.

You worked on an upcoming documentary about Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist temple and a UNESCO World Heritage monument. Can you tell us more about that?

In 2020, members of UNESCO requested the Indonesian government to study the impact of tourism on Borobudur out of concern for its stability. Indeed, every year, this world heritage site is damaged by the passing of almost 40 million visitors. Alarmed by UNESCO, five Indonesian ministries went on to create a major rescue program for Borobudur, which included raising awareness among visitors about its fragility, educating surrounding communities on its historical value, as well as making a documentary series on the temple that would be financed by the Directorate General of Culture. I was chosen to be part of the documentary team as a researcher, and I wrote the initial scripts of the first and second episodes. The series was then shot in October and November of 2021 and should be released soon.

What is the relationship between the Indonesian population, which is predominantly Muslim, and its ancient Hindu and Buddhist heritage? What impact does it have on your work?

Many Indonesians no longer acknowledge the connection with these religious systems and the artifacts associated with them. Monuments are no longer associated with Buddhism or Hinduism because they are seen as dead structures or inanimate objects. As the majority of Indonesians

are Muslim, ancient Hindu and Buddhist heritage sites are perceived as distant relics. They are mainly visited as places of tourism, while very few people actually go to them for worship. Myself, because I have received the knowledge of Islam since childhood, I struggle sometimes when dealing with Hindu and Buddhist heritage sites. These places and monuments require me to understand these ancient religions well, even when they are not part of Indonesian culture today. Finding relevant sources can be hard, but I have made an effort to learn everything from scratch.

Furthermore, to read and understand this part of our heritage today, we must rely on studies carried out by foreign experts in the 19th to early 20th centuries. The last important research took place between the 1960s and 1990s, to the exception of a few Hindu-Buddhist specialists from France who have continued their predecessors' work, like Andrea Acri or Arlo Griffiths. This situation creates a gap between our national heritage and the scholarship used to learn it.

What are some obstacles that you face in your work?

I think the biggest obstacle is that we have very few active experts of pre-16th century Indonesia in the country at the moment. Even archaeologists are heavily influenced by socio-cultural anthropology, meaning that they often study recent periods. There is a huge shortage of research projects that delve deep into Indonesia's heritage before the 16th century, and younger generations are becoming less interested in these earlier periods. As a result, I often lack a discussion partner with whom to exchange ideas, and struggle to find the right mentor for this field of expertise.



Jalatunda Temple in Mojokerto, Indonesia (detail)
© courtesy of Herstori



Shooting for Herstori. Jalatunda Temple in Mojokerto, Indonesia
© courtesy of Herstori

You are launching an ambitious and inspiring project called Herstori, which aims to enhance Indonesian women's narratives by combining art history, fashion, heritage, and education. Can you tell us more about it?

I met fashion designer Nina Nugroho when she asked me if I could help her son with an apprenticeship. He was studying history, and I took him to various museums so he could have a glance at what curatorial work is. He then watched a video about me, made by Indonesia Kaya, an Indonesian cultural platform, and surgeon and film director Dr. Tompi, about how to incorporate history and archeology into creative industries by using videogames, comics, animation, songs, and so on to build interest in ancient cultural heritage among younger generations. This video inspired Nina, who works in the fashion industry and handles a weekly workshop on women's empowerment in Jakarta. This is how we decided to collaborate on a project that connects Indonesian archeology with fashion and female empowerment. Strong female historical figures are absent from narratives taught in Indonesia today. With Herstori, we use traditional fabrics to design modern fashion. We source iconography in ancient representations of women on Indonesian statues, carvings, and manuscripts to create motives for the fabric hoping to empower present-day Indonesian women through these historical figures. We decided to name the project Herstori as an antithesis of history as "his"-story.

Nina is the owner of a Muslim clothing brand, which makes for a challenging and fruitful collaboration, because we use Hindu- and Buddhist-era figures on Muslim garments, like the hijab. We are willing to disconnect clothing and motives from beliefs. The output of our collaboration, besides the product itself, is to educate people on literature and history. To that end, we have created a monthly e-book that tells the history of each female character who has

inspired our designs. I hope that Herstori and other projects can help the younger generation understand their culture through media that is familiar to them. Herstori's main purpose is not to sell culture but to spread cultural knowledge within new media.

And this is not your only ongoing project...

I am working on another project on *aksara* scripts. My goal is to create a museum which will showcase Indonesian scripts to highlight the extraordinary level of literacy development in this country. The ancient scripts found in manuscripts and inscriptions have many variants. However, what is known to the general public or learned in school is no more than ten *aksara* characters. I would like to change that and encourage children to learn ancient scripts. The first thing is to introduce these languages and forms of writing in an appealing way through media used by young people. For that reason, I am working on an animated film and series based on comics called *Pranaya*. The story is based on the famous epic called the *Ramayana*. I find it interesting to present this story based on temples' sculptures and ancient manuscripts in the global animation industry.

There are still a lot of existing clichés in relation to the field of archeology today. Is the profession changing in Indonesia?

The younger generation in Indonesia mainly knows about epigraphy and archaeology from the manga *One Piece*, while the older generation learnt about it through Indiana Jones. But our reality as archaeologists is different. Researchers in this country usually work for the government, and out of the 40 archaeology graduates each year, very few will continue afterward because it is difficult to make a living from it.

I hope that the projects that I undertake will bring change and create new ways to approach archaeology. I put a lot of effort into developing interdisciplinary projects together with creative industries. I like working with documentaries, and hope to develop fiction films, virtual museums, video games, and more. My goal is to share Indonesian history and culture, and introduce these disciplines into new media.

On one hand, I work as a literary writer, and on the other hand, I write academic papers. I want to form a bridge between the creative and academic worlds. There is still a lot of mutual depreciation, sarcasm even, between them, but I believe the future lies there, in the middle.

Johan Levillain and Agathe Torres

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Shooting for Herstori. Jalatunda Temple in Mojokerto, Indonesia
© courtesy of Herstori





TO TAKE SPACE

Six Continents or More, Palais de Tokyo





“Six Continents or More” is what one might call a patchwork of artistic imaginations. Designed as a season, this mega-exhibition that brings together six individual shows provides space for artists to express themselves in a museum conceived as a world without center or borders. The spaces and themes of the exhibitions respond to each other, as a world shaped into a place of variable geography where ideas and cultures circulate on a continental scale. Marked by its past, this imagined world is nevertheless not built without issues and violence. Each exhibition has its own dedicated area, and their conjunction can be read as the juxtaposition of works and artists who come from different nations.



Despite each artist taking up a subject that is specific to them, the installations resonate with one another. Installations within “Six Continents or More” converge around certain issues and struggles, such as colonization and colonialism, the loss or definition of identity, the reclamation and reconquest of territories, self-identification, appropriation, openness, class warfare, duty of memory, or even the will of disruption. Encompassing six shows for the visitor to explore, developed

around such complex themes and providing such diverse answers, the experience is long, even trying at times; nevertheless, necessary. If one wants to engage with artists who give free rein to their words and opinions, one must reflect about political, social, societal, anthropological, and geographical concepts one may have difficulty grasping. Such a challenging experience is perhaps what a museum-goer should expect, or even demand, from an art institution today.

Maya Mihindou, view of the exhibition *Sarah Maldoror: Cinéma Tricontinental*,

Palais de Tokyo, mural painting and drawing (detail)

Courtesy of the artist, photo: Agathe Torres

Previous page: Jonathan Jones, study for *untitled (transcription of country)*, 2021,

historical prints, objects, embroideries by

Shabnam Mukhi, Lida Heidari and Rabia Azizi.

Courtesy of the artist.



Aïda Bruyère, exhibition *Never Again*, season
"Six continents ou plus," Palais de Tokyo.
Photo: Aurélien Mole

Access. A quality which often rhymes with privilege: having access to the social ladder, to culture, to certain reserved spaces, to power, or to education, among others. Many of the artists exhibited in this section question what an accessible world would be, and how one would reach it. In *Never Again*, Aïda Bruyère, a French artist who grew up in Mali, provides us with access to nightclubs by recreating the atmosphere of the dancing clubs of Dakar where she used to spend time. The space that she materializes through her work is a safe place where women have the ability to be who they are. *Never Again* also creates an atmosphere where the body is free, from lockdowns and from body injunctions. A twelve-feet-tall female body is projected against the wall, filling the room with its colossal presence. Contrasting with the idea of freedom, this silhouette reflects the stereotypes that govern places of sociability like nightclubs—clichés that answer and contradict each other placed at the junction between dominant culture and counterculture. On a floor strewn with leaflets announcing an all-female musical program, Aïda Bruyère's installation brings attention to the opposition and the plurality of expressions of identity, sometimes elaborated in opposition to dominant models of self-presentation.

The scene changes in the following display. Maxwell Alexandre, a Brazilian artist who grew up in Rio de Janeiro, lends himself to the exercise of mise-en-abyme. In a maze of white sheets—a color that symbolizes White domination of art spaces—Alexandre challenges the spectator to face their own position as a museum-goer. A mock exhibition space reminds us that, by

visiting a museum at that precise moment, chances are that we have already benefited from a certain kind of privilege. Through his work, Alexandre emphasizes the need for people of color to physically occupy White-dominant spaces. This confrontation forces the museum-goer to ask: How can we rethink the dissemination of culture? And what is culture, anyway? To that point, it is worth noting that Alexandre rarely exhibits his own art in museums, but instead within street performances. In his installation at "Six Continents or More", the fence, the security guard, the policeman, and the mixed audience that inhabit his museum made of hanging sheets redefine the existing codes within cultural spaces. The raw canvases do not set a single path. Unlike traditional paintings, which are well protected behind their frames, Alexandre's works can be examined closely and are accessible, touchable, like laundry drying on a line, a trivial and familiar display. Another contrast can be found in the stark distinction that there is between one's own passive attitude as a spectator and the violence on which this installation sheds light in the context of the museum. In this situation, the visitor further wonders: What is shown in art museums, and how has the museum been historically constructed according to a White- and Euro-centric understanding of art?





Jonathan Jones, exhibition *untitled (transcription of country)*,
2021, Palais de Tokyo.
Photo : Aurélien Mole

1800. 1801. 1802. 1803. 1804. 1805. 1806. 1807. 1808. 1809. 1810. 1811. 1812. 1813. 1814. 1815. 1816. 1817. 1818. 1819. 1820. 1821. 1822. 1823. 1824. 1825. 1826. 1827. 1828. 1829. 1830. 1831. 1832. 1833. 1834. 1835. 1836. 1837. 1838. 1839. 1840. 1841. 1842. 1843. 1844. 1845. 1846. 1847. 1848. 1849. 1850. 1851. 1852. 1853. 1854. 1855. 1856. 1857. 1858. 1859. 1860. 1861. 1862. 1863. 1864. 1865. 1866. 1867. 1868. 1869. 1870. 1871. 1872. 1873. 1874. 1875. 1876. 1877. 1878. 1879. 1880. 1881. 1882. 1883. 1884. 1885. 1886. 1887. 1888. 1889. 1890. 1891. 1892. 1893. 1894. 1895. 1896. 1897. 1898. 1899. 1900. 1901. 1902. 1903. 1904. 1905. 1906. 1907. 1908. 1909. 1910. 1911. 1912. 1913. 1914. 1915. 1916. 1917. 1918. 1919. 1920. 1921. 1922. 1923. 1924. 1925. 1926. 1927. 1928. 1929. 1930. 1931. 1932. 1933. 1934. 1935. 1936. 1937. 1938. 1939. 1940. 1941. 1942. 1943. 1944. 1945. 1946. 1947. 1948. 1949. 1950. 1951. 1952. 1953. 1954. 1955. 1956. 1957. 1958. 1959. 1960. 1961. 1962. 1963. 1964. 1965. 1966. 1967. 1968. 1969. 1970. 1971. 1972. 1973. 1974. 1975. 1976. 1977. 1978. 1979. 1980. 1981. 1982. 1983. 1984. 1985. 1986. 1987. 1988. 1989. 1990. 1991. 1992. 1993. 1994. 1995. 1996. 1997. 1998. 1999. 2000. 2001. 2002. 2003. 2004. 2005. 2006. 2007. 2008. 2009. 2010. 2011. 2012. 2013. 2014. 2015. 2016. 2017. 2018. 2019. 2020. 2021. 2022. 2023. 2024. 2025. 2026. 2027. 2028. 2029. 2030. 2031. 2032. 2033. 2034. 2035. 2036. 2037. 2038. 2039. 2040. 2041. 2042. 2043. 2044. 2045. 2046. 2047. 2048. 2049. 2050. 2051. 2052. 2053. 2054. 2055. 2056. 2057. 2058. 2059. 2060. 2061. 2062. 2063. 2064. 2065. 2066. 2067. 2068. 2069. 2070. 2071. 2072. 2073. 2074. 2075. 2076. 2077. 2078. 2079. 2080. 2081. 2082. 2083. 2084. 2085. 2086. 2087. 2088. 2089. 2090. 2091. 2092. 2093. 2094. 2095. 2096. 2097. 2098. 2099. 2100. 2101. 2102. 2103. 2104. 2105. 2106. 2107. 2108. 2109. 2110. 2111. 2112. 2113. 2114. 2115. 2116. 2117. 2118. 2119. 2120. 2121. 2122. 2123. 2124. 2125. 2126. 2127. 2128. 2129. 2130. 2131. 2132. 2133. 2134. 2135. 2136. 2137. 2138. 2139. 2140. 2141. 2142. 2143. 2144. 2145. 2146. 2147. 2148. 2149. 2150. 2151. 2152. 2153. 2154. 2155. 2156. 2157. 2158. 2159. 2160. 2161. 2162. 2163. 2164. 2165. 2166. 2167. 2168. 2169. 2170. 2171. 2172. 2173. 2174. 2175. 2176. 2177. 2178. 2179. 2180. 2181. 2182. 2183. 2184. 2185. 2186. 2187. 2188. 2189. 2190. 2191. 2192. 2193. 2194. 2195. 2196. 2197. 2198. 2199. 2200. 2201. 2202. 2203. 2204. 2205. 2206. 2207. 2208. 2209. 2210. 2211. 2212. 2213. 2214. 2215. 2216. 2217. 2218. 2219. 2220. 2221. 2222. 2223. 2224. 2225. 2226. 2227. 2228. 2229. 2230. 2231. 2232. 2233. 2234. 2235. 2236. 2237. 2238. 2239. 2240. 2241. 2242. 2243. 2244. 2245. 2246. 2247. 2248. 2249. 2250. 2251. 2252. 2253. 2254. 2255. 2256. 2257. 2258. 2259. 2260. 2261. 2262. 2263. 2264. 2265. 2266. 2267. 2268. 2269. 2270. 2271. 2272. 2273. 2274. 2275. 2276. 2277. 2278. 2279. 2280. 2281. 2282. 2283. 2284. 2285. 2286. 2287. 2288. 2289. 2290. 2291. 2292. 2293. 2294. 2295. 2296. 2297. 2298. 2299. 2300. 2301. 2302. 2303. 2304. 2305. 2306. 2307. 2308. 2309. 2310. 2311. 2312. 2313. 2314. 2315. 2316. 2317. 2318. 2319. 2320. 2321. 2322. 2323. 2324. 2325. 2326. 2327. 2328. 2329. 2330. 2331. 2332. 2333. 2334. 2335. 2336. 2337. 2338. 2339. 2340. 2341. 2342. 2343. 2344. 2345. 2346. 2347. 2348. 2349. 2350. 2351. 2352. 2353. 2354. 2355. 2356. 2357. 2358. 2359. 2360. 2361. 2362. 2363. 2364. 2365. 2366. 2367. 2368. 2369. 2370. 2371. 2372. 2373. 2374. 2375. 2376. 2377. 2378. 2379. 2380. 2381. 2382. 2383. 2384. 2385. 2386. 2387. 2388. 2389. 2390. 2391. 2392. 2393. 2394. 2395. 2396. 2397. 2398. 2399. 2400. 2401. 2402. 2403. 2404. 2405. 2406. 2407. 2408. 2409. 2410. 2411. 2412. 2413. 2414. 2415. 2416. 2417. 2418. 2419. 2420. 2421. 2422. 2423. 2424. 2425. 2426. 2427. 2428. 2429. 2430. 2431. 2432. 2433. 2434. 2435. 2436. 2437. 2438. 2439. 2440. 2441. 2442. 2443. 2444. 2445. 2446. 2447. 2448. 2449. 2450. 2451. 2452. 2453. 2454. 2455. 2456. 2457. 2458. 2459. 2460. 2461. 2462. 2463. 2464. 2465. 2466. 2467. 2468. 2469. 2470. 2471. 2472. 2473. 2474. 2475. 2476. 2477. 2478. 2479. 2480. 2481.

Prohibetur talibus restitui.
 Prohibetur talibus restitui.



Sabelo Mlangeni, *After dance, Sodiq*, 2019.
"The Royal House of Allure" series.
Courtesy of the artist and Blank Projects (Le Cap).

Plurality. Of materials, of discourses, of origins, of flows. On a desk that seems to be a kilometer long, the installation of Jonathan Jones, an Australian artist, is spread out. It consists of a display of black thread embroidered on a white background, handmade by groups of refugee and migrant women in Sydney. These thread paintings reproduce, in detail, the photographs of an archive: herbariums of plants inventoried at the end of a French scientific expedition to Australia in the 19th century. These archives are kept in various museums and collections in France. The final object resulting from these thread paintings, this embroidery, contains more historical narrative than yarn. This woven photograph reproduces the archive extract identically: we see the plant, picked in Australia, the note dated to the time of its harvest, the barcode of the scanned leaf added much more recently in the context of collection management, but also the hand that embroidered this piece in Sydney.

The black thread, through its appearances and disappearances from the textile surface, seems to imitate the thread of time and the comings and goings of the specimen. The very technique of the handmade embroidery, slow and fine, which reproduces the scan with its erasures and its defects, seems to be in opposition with the idea of the documentary snapshot of the archival photograph. The embroidery's lace border underlines the journey of the object between Europe and Australia. In this material summary of history, everything blends together at a glance: the origin, the plant, its collection, its conservation, its extraction, and its textile reproduction. While we try to follow the historical mishmash of the object, Jones, through this creation, synthesizes almost all the issues that the theme of plurality can entail: identity, expropriation, uprooting, accessibility, identity reconstruction, colonization, artistic traditions, and technical syncretism, among many others.

For Michael Armitage, a Kenyan artist, the material is also political since he uses, instead of the classic woven canvas, the bark of a tree, the *lubugo*, to paint. This technique is that of the Baganda people in Uganda. Armitage's pastel-colored paintings resemble impressionist canvases, creating, once again, a mix of visual references. The iconography relays the political message, since the scenes depict events related to contemporary southern Africa. A way for the artist to multiply the levels of meaning.

Identity. A word that resonates with deconstruction and with multiplicity. For Maya Mihindou, a France-based Gabonian artist, identity also rhymes with memory. The artist's didactic illustrations attempt to restore the memory of certain figures who have not been given their rightful place in dominant historical narratives. Mihindou's installation functions as a means to reconstruct history in the aftermath of their writing in history books, giving a place in the present to those whose voices have not been relayed. Identity is also constructed through collective memory. Deconstructing is also reconstructing by filling in the gaps in history by completing colonial and post-colonial history.

For Sabelo Mlangeni, a South African artist, the search for identity is that of the contemporary oppressed, a search well anchored in the present. In a black and white photographic work, he immerses himself in the identity and territorial exploration—can one go without the other?—of the Black gay communities of Lagos, Nigeria, where identifying oneself in certain ways carries consequences within these marginalized and vulnerable but supportive communities. In *A World of Illusions*, a triptych film installation, Portuguese artist Grada Kilomba questions the omnipresence of white identity in classical representations. In her work, she attempts to reappropriate the narratives of classical Greek mythology, forcing these mythological figures to adopt new bodies and new identities, and speak to new political and social issues.



Exhibition *Ubuntu*, season "Six continents ou plus,"
Palais de Tokyo.
Photo: Aurélien Mole

Dissidence. Sarah Maldoror is a Black filmmaker born in the Gers, France, to a Guadeloupean father. Maldoror's radical cinema focuses on Africa and the Antilles; using her camera to film is for her a political necessity. Maldoror made her debut filming power struggles and liberation in two Portuguese-speaking African countries, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. In her exhibition, the space is divided between excerpts from her films, dialogues between the director and intellectuals, and extracts from contemporary movies.

In this dissident lineage, Jay Ramier, an artist born in Guadeloupe, titled his installation *Keep the Fire Burning (Gadé défié limé)*. The starting point of his artistic material is music, more specifically the genesis of French hip-hop in the 1980s. Ramier draws on this aesthetic to pay homage to various icons of African-American revolts or anti-colonialism movements and keep their memory alive. Through his work, we are reminded that arts intersect, and that music may also be political.

Resorting to a different kind of artistic language, Daniel Ontero Torres, a Colombian artist, revisits the forgotten female figures of 20th-century Latin American revolts and liberation movements with the installation *Si no bailas conmigo, no hago parte de tu revolución*. This title is based on a well-known slogan chanted in feminist

protests, itself inspired by the writings of the feminist political anarchist Emma Goldman. From this fertile ground rise hybrid and imposing sculptures. Zimbabwean artist Kudzanai Chiurai, on the other hand, angrily paints pages from history books with titles such as "The Roots of White Supremacy." In his *Library of Things We Forgot to Remember*, he rewrites the history that we failed to tell.

Disruption. A term defined as that which tends to rupture. The discourse of the artists in this specific exhibit is very much political. For them to expose the struggles of today, they have to make sure that these issues are not vampirized by those of yesterday or presented as if frozen in time or belonging to history books—because these fights are not over but ongoing. Here, decompartmentalizing the world, reconstructing identity, and decolonizing discourses are not abstract issues but concrete realities as observed in migratory crisis, inequalities in the distribution of wealth, corporeal oppression, hazardous territorialization, and environmental destruction. "Six Continents or More" intends to deconstruct space to make room for a unified philosophical and literary terrain. Thinking and rethinking is what brings all these artists' voices together. "Six Continents or More" is a polyphony in which revolt screams.

Agathe Torres

Season "Six Continents or More"

Palais de Tokyo, Paris

November 2021–March 2022

Ubuntu, un rêve lucide

Sarah Maldoror: Cinéma tricontinental

Maxwell Alexandre: New power

Aïda Bruyère: Never again

Jonathan Jones: untitled (transcription of country)

Jay Ramier: Keep the Fire Burning (Gadé Difé Limé)



Jonathan Jones, exhibition *untitled (transcription of country)*,
2021, Palais de Tokyo.
Photo : Aurélien Mole





SCULPTURAL PIPES & SACRED MATERIALS

in the Mississippian World



With polished, ruddy hues and two piercing, wide eyes, the sculptural pipe known to archaeologists as “Big Boy” commands attention (Fig. 1). Excavated from a mortuary context at the site of Spiro in present-day Oklahoma, United States, this deeply meditative figure, his visual details, and his materiality have much to tell us.

Standing over 23 centimeters in height, the cross-legged figure leans forward with his hair coiled into a bun and a large braid draped over his shoulder. On his back, he wears a mantle that drips with what may be feathers or sewn spade designs. Additionally he sports human-faced earrings and a ring of shell beads around his neck. On his forehead sits a flat cap with a raised border that may have once displayed a small copper plate. Traces of red ochre still cling to the surface of the object which, because of its size, may have once been a single-standing sculpture that was later repurposed as a pipe. Two holes on his backside nod to this later, ritual use: the top likely used for holding dried, crushed tobacco leaves and the bottom for inhaling the emergent smoke. His distinct features and ritual treatment have led archaeologists to identify him as Morning Star or Red Horn, two names used to refer to a mytho-historical figure who held religious prominence among Indigenous communities throughout the Mississippi Valley and in the Southeast of what is today the United States. In fact, Red Horn is a central protagonist in the oral histories of the nearby descendant Báxoje and Ho-Chunk peoples of North America.

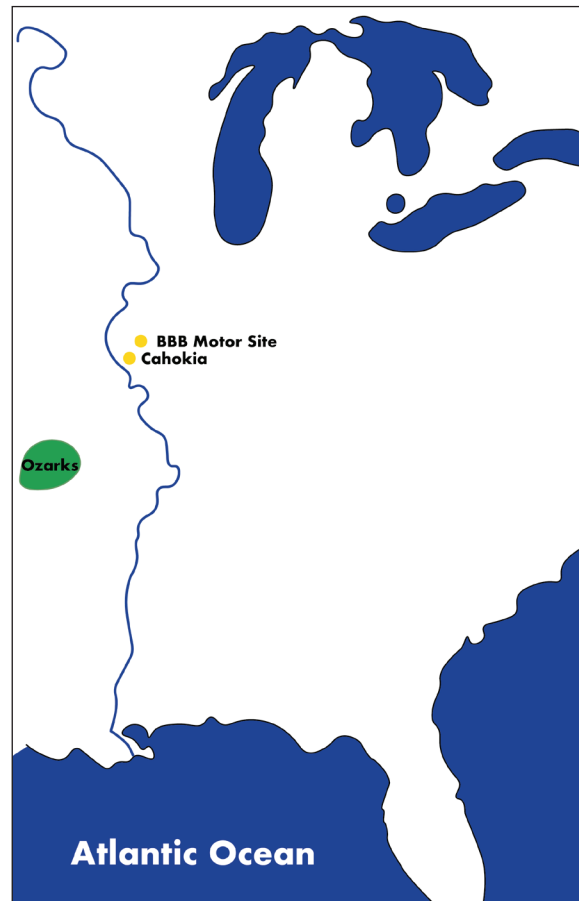
Sculptural pipes like “Big Boy” abound from sites across the Mississippi Valley and beyond. They hail from an artistic tradition that archaeologists call the Mississippian culture, which dates roughly from 800CE to the manifold waves of invasions led by Europeans in the 17th

century. Geographically, the label casts a wide net from the northern Mississippi Valley down into the Southeast. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, many Mississippian sites were uprooted by amateur antiquarians and damaged in public works projects. Some archaeological sites still bear the names of these public works companies, such as the BBB Motor site at Cahokia in present-day Illinois. With complicated histories of vandalism, a lack of written records, and little to no standing architecture, Mississippian sites and their characteristic earthworks made of piled soil (Fig. 4) have both delighted and puzzled scholars. Such earth structures were once the loci of wooden architecture, but their stark appearance today has resulted in labels like ‘mound builders’ for its architects, downplaying the complexity of Mississippian building practices and the historic use and look of these structures. Mounds were used to raise structures and were formed by the layered remnants of when these structures were terminated and burned, and ultimately used as platforms for later iterations of the buildings atop. Typical buildings that topped mounds included temples, sweat lodges, council houses, and mortuary structures.¹ In the absence of these structures today due to the poor preservation of organic remains in the area, however, other kinds of material and visual culture can provide critical clues on life and religion at these sites; an aspect which has been virtually dismissed by art historians.

Previous page:

Fig. 1 | Mississippian artist, “Big Boy” pipe

© Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Museum Collections



Perhaps the most famous corpus of sculptural pipes comes from the site of Cahokia (Fig. 2). Sitting near the Mississippi River, Cahokia was one of the largest Indigenous cities in a network of Mississippian communities that stretched across the eastern half of North America. Cahokia thrived from 900 to 1200 CE, and its urban layout centered around a large, two-tiered raised earthen structure that is today referred to as Monks Mound. This modern name originated with the structure's use by a group of Trappist monks who occupied the site from 1735 to 1752. To the south of the so-called Monks Mound was a vast plaza-like space that was apt for gathering the community for lavish ceremonies or playing ritual games like chunky. In chunky, players would cast a rolling disc onto a large, open grassy field and then attempt to toss spears where the disc landed. Other urban features at Cahokia included a complex irrigation system

with human-made reservoirs, a circle of wooden posts that kept time with the sun, and a wooden palisade that separated elite neighborhoods and ritual spaces from other living areas that sprawled out from the city center.

A city like Cahokia reveals the sophisticated networks and urban plans that Indigenous peoples constructed to accommodate large populations. Around 1200 CE, large regional centers began to rise elsewhere in eastern North America, including at sites like Moundville, Spiro, and Etowah. Rivers provided fertile floodplains and transport for Mississippian communities. With its position on the Mississippi River, Cahokia inhabitants benefited from vast trade networks that reached these other Indigenous communities located along riverbeds or near moving water. Their contact with one another is evident in their art. For instance, shells from the Gulf

Fig. 2 | Schematic map of the main locations mentioned in the article



Fig. 3 | Mississippian artist, Chunkey player effigy pipe
© Courtesy of the Saint Louis Science Center

Coast were carved into pendants worn by individuals at Cahokia, and imagery appearing at Cahokia also surfaces at other Mississippian sites like Etowah in present-day Georgia. The Mississippian world was thus connected, vibrant, and agriculturally rich, and its communities benefited from one another.

Due to similarities between 13th-century eastern North American sites, especially in architectural form and material culture, scholars have (incorrectly) linked their religious beliefs, ceremonies, and art.² Most recently, however, archaeologist Vernon James Knight, Jr. has pushed us to see the Mississippian world as a complex of religious networks in which diverse sets of sacred beings were worshiped. Each site had unique relationships with these various figures, such as Cahokia which placed emphasis on the Earth Mother. Others, like Spiro, favored Red Horn. Knight's analysis of religion and beliefs among the Mississippians corroborates the diversity of red stone sculptural pipes recovered from these sites.

Sculptural pipes in red stone like "Big Boy" mirror the complexities of Mississippian religions and cultures. Mississippian pipes reveal evidence of religious networks that stretched across the North American landscape, as many of these objects were dedicated to specific sacred figures. In a 2015 essay, archaeologist Thomas Emerson spoke to these networks at Cahokia linked to the Earth Mother, who had a strong following at the site because of its sizable population and wealth of arable lands.³ What reveals these network types are a series of Cahokian red stone sculptures that portray a young woman in various agricultural poses. A kneeling woman, known as the Birger figure, sinks a hoe into the back of a feline-headed serpent which curls around her knees and backside. The serpent's tail crawls up the woman's back transforming into a vine filled with gourds. Another sculpture from a 12th-century temple complex sits behind a

basket possibly used in weaving or storing textile bundles.⁴ Within Cahokian religion, the Earth Mother is visualized with concepts of fertility, agriculture, and weaving, as reflected here in the use of a hoe, the snaky earth ploughed to form vines, and the reference to woven baskets and textiles. In later Siouan oral traditions from the same region, the Earth Mother is known by many names that refer to her fertile and fibrous domains, including Mother Evening Star, Mother Moon, Spider Woman, Mother Corn, and Snake Woman.

Aside from the Earth Mother, red stone sculptures depict male figures, including types such as "Big Boy," chunky players, and religious leaders. We have already looked closely at "Big Boy," but consider a Cahokian-style chunky player who also wears a hair bun like him and carries a bead pendant around his neck (Fig. 3). His face appears stoic, flanked by large, dangling ear ornaments. The player seems focused, about to cast the chunky stone whose concave, circular shape lies gripped at his right side, while in his left hand he grasps a wooden stick. Most chunky portrayals illustrate the dynamism of the game, with players' arms mid-heft of the spear and the stone pulled backwards before launching it into the air; such a steady, restful pose in the case of the sculpture being examined is intriguing for the lively sport of chunky. Finally, a religious leader sculpture from Cahokia unveils a different type of sacred male figure who has a rattle in his right hand and a serpent draped around his neck. Emerson interprets this sculpture as a leader mid-trance.⁵ As seen in these three objects related to Cahokia, Mississippian sculptors pulled from a diverse assemblage of male figures for use in their religious contexts.

Whether presenting male or female sacred figures, it is remarkable that each sculpture is poised in a kneeling position and was ultimately drilled to create pipes. Many of the smaller sculptures that present religious leaders are shown in mid-transformation, with their faces and bodies shifting to

heighten the narcotic stupor or trance they experience. Since these sculptures were used to hold and smoke tobacco or hallucinogenic substances, it makes sense to see such transformative imagery carved into the red stone. It is this practicality of the sculpture as a pipe that allows us to place them as key, routinely-used objects in the heyday of Cahokian religious life. Such diversity in the representation of these sculptural pipes, however, begs the question: Were there separate religious groups at Cahokia who revered different sacred figures, or were religious groups equipped with multiple types of sculpture for use depending on the ritual context? The fact that the Earth Mother sculpture with the basket was found in the same structure as the Earth Mother with the hoe and no other effigy helps support the view that each building was dedicated to a specific figure and its worship.

Seen another way, the divided presence of male and female sculptures may hint at gendered forms of worship at sites like Cahokia. Art historians and historians have traditionally left women out of their studies on Mississippian sites. As historian Lyle Koelher notes, this omission is striking as women were vital creators in their reproductive and cosmological roles.⁶ Indeed, women at Cahokia were skilled makers of baskets, mats, pottery, moccasins, and foodstuffs, and were intimately involved in religious ceremonies privy to leaders. For instance, archaeologist Susan Alt describes the *wa-xo'-be* ritual, where women helped to prepare war medicine bundles for new religious leaders.⁷ She also identifies the Emerald site with its lunar shrine complex just outside of Cahokia as the location where these bundle-making activities occurred. What Koelher, Alt, and the female stone sculptures of Cahokia raise for us is the possibility that there were female religious leaders in the Mississippian world. Perhaps religious groups were gendered, with those caring for the Earth Mother being

predominantly female, whereas those responsible for male figures like Red Horn were managed by male leaders.

Though their iconography is disparate, these stone sculptures-turned-pipes are connected by their materiality. Simply looking at the visuals of these figures offers an isolated understanding of them, but we know these sculptures were made of similar stone and used in related ritual contexts. Cahokians frequently made material connections among objects, evident in their use of shell, which can be found at various parts of the site and was an integral raw material. Shells became part of construction techniques at Cahokia being used in the clays that raised and stabilized pyramidal platforms. Additionally, the presence of shells linked platforms to ideologies of the watery world in Cahokian religion. Due to their appearance in the fertile clays of the Mississippian Valley, they were also associated with the arable fields used to cultivate maize. Within ceramics at Cahokia, shell acted as a key ingredient that stabilized pot walls. The use of shells like mussels in mortuary offerings further tied burials to the watery underworld and, subsequently, connected ancestral bodies with the Mississippi floodplains. By looking at the use and ideology of shells, we can highlight the associations that Cahokians would have held about this material, as well as all the possible links they could have made between ritual, agricultural, and architectural contexts. Together, these bundled activities would have “added meaning and legitimacy to Mississippian life.”⁸

Archaeologists have noted material connections in interpreting the site of Cahokia and its religious practices. Looking at the nearby Ozark mountains with its many caves, springs, and natural resources, they have concluded these were sites where sacred materials were sought. The Saint François mountains have several basalt dykes surrounded by cedar



Fig. 4 | Platform mound in Aztalan State Park (Wisconsin)
© Joshua Mayer



Fig. 5 | Mississippian artist, kneeling male figure
© Metropolitan Museum of Art

glades, and both basalt and red cedar were conceived as sacred in Cahokian religion.⁹ To procure such resources, Cahokians traveled to these mountain chains, undergoing a spiritual journey. For instance, moving toward the mountains, Cahokians descended into the valley and climbed the mountains. Archaeologists John Kelly and James Brown interpret this route as a cosmic movement into Mother Earth and, following, an ascension toward the celestial realm. The presence of many caves and water reservoirs along the way would have drawn reference to the watery underworld during the journey. Hence, the quest for sacred materials and movement through the wider Cahokian landscape bore religious significance as one moved symbolically through three layers of the cosmos.

These symbolic understandings of materials and space—shells and the Ozark mountains—can help us to interpret how the red stone of sculptural pipes functioned in the Mississippian world. Originally, these sculptures were thought to be made of bauxite, a rock with high deposits of aluminum that would have traveled north along the Mississippi River from present-day Arkansas. However, recent studies have revealed the stone to be a local type of densely packed red flint clay, which was a material sourced from the Ozarks, the same mountain chain through which Cahokians conducted their spiritual journey to acquire basalt and cedar.¹⁰ Thus, to retrieve the red flint clay used to make these sculptural pipes, Cahokians traveled through the same landscape that descended into Mother Earth, climbed into the sky, and featured watery stops along the way. When carried back to the center of Cahokia, the red flint clay itself went on a sacred journey through the cosmos. Before the material was even carved into sacred figures, it was already charged with sacred meaning by virtue of this movement through space.

Once the material arrived at Cahokia, it was then carved to present sacred figures important in the city's religion. Because of red flint clay's common source and its journey through the Ozark landscape, the material would have been physically and spiritually connected. In the minds of Cahokians, much like the example of shells, the materiality of these sculptures would have threaded together various ritual contexts, architecture, and religious beliefs. The use of red flint clay also linked religious networks that existed beyond the city center of Cahokia. Not only did sculptural pipes connect the center of Cahokia with its periphery, but they also connected Cahokia to a wider landscape that included the Mississippi River Valley and the Ozark Highlands. The materiality of sculptural pipes thus centered Cahokia in the Mississippian world and the transcendent cosmos. Because one descended into the earth to acquire its red flint clay, the Earth Mother sculptures resonate with the materiality of the pipes. The carving of the sky hero Red Horn, additionally, nods to the celestial realm, another dimension of the movement of Cahokians through the Ozarks. The use of red flint clay also alludes to the transformative qualities of these sculptural figures and their ability to shapeshift and take on different personalities in Cahokian religion—recall, for instance, Earth Mother v. Spider Woman. Red flint clay is a sedimentary rock, meaning that clay is compacted and pressurized into a hardened form. When Cahokian sculptors carved the raw material, the rock underwent another transformation to produce these sculptural pipes. In sum, because it came from the earth and had mutable properties, red flint clay was the perfect material for presenting sacred figures who were celebrated for their transformative abilities. We can, too, imagine the dazzling visual display of smoking from behind a sculptural pipe. Putting one's lips to the back and inhaling the smoke hid the face and, in doing so, gave the user a masked appearance to other participants. Such a *trompe-l'oeil*

allowed the user to transform into the figure presented in the sculpture.

Looking at Mississippian sculptural pipes presents us with a complex history of Indigenous religions. The plurality of these religious objects and their threaded materiality highlight how communities understood them at places like Cahokia. In our close look at Cahokian sculpted pipes, we saw vast religious networks that animated both center and periphery, observed the gendered dimensions of religious life, and appreciated the spiritual aspects of procuring raw materials used to produce these pipes. Sculptural pipes also complicate categories scholars often take for granted and consider uniformly such as Mississippian religion and culture. Many other types of sculpture exist at Mississippian sites, including paired male and female figures, and they prompt us to wonder what historical evidence these seemingly silent figures bear (Fig. 5). Closer analysis of Mississippian materials and visuals by art historians—as we have aspired to do in our overview of sculptural pipes—has the power to illuminate the dynamic world of Indigenous communities in the past. It is up to us to step closer, think broadly, and uncover the histories these objects tell.

Anthony J. Meyer

ENDNOTES

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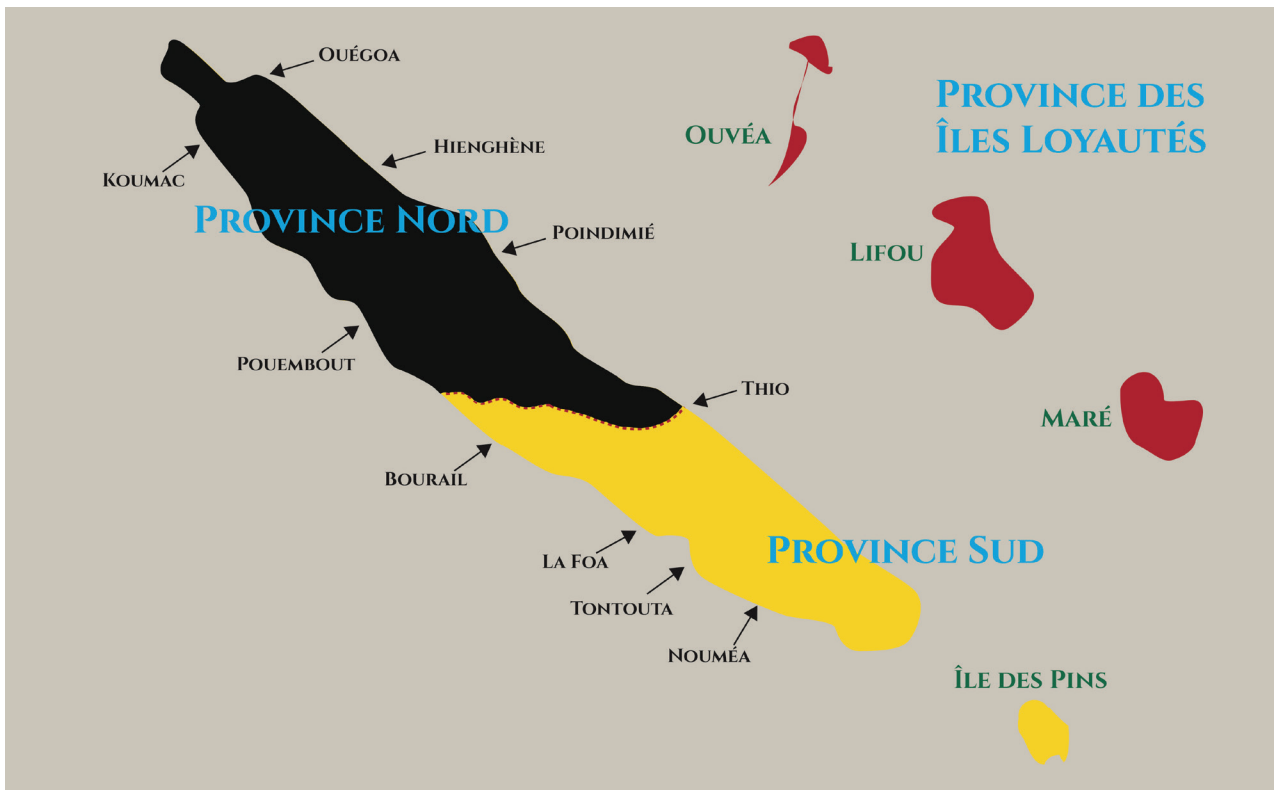


K A N A K
C O I N S





Coins are composite objects exchanged within the world of the Kanak people, the indigenous populations of New Caledonia in the Pacific Ocean. The labeling of these objects as coins derives from the European perception of these objects based on their function. However, their meaning goes beyond economic value, carrying a strong symbolic and social power, today as well as in the past. Today, as Kanak coins are exhibited in museums around the world, these objects' social, symbolic, and economical value is enhanced by their significance as markers of heritage. Let us focus on these objects that materialize relationships as they are established.



WHAT IS A KANAK COIN?

The so-called traditional Kanak coins are made of a wide variety of materials of animal and vegetal origin: *roussette* hair—a bat endemic to New Caledonia—mother-of-pearl and other pieces of shell, animal and, more rarely, human bones, as well as fibers of various plant species. Materials are chosen for their preciousness and symbolic meaning. For example, beaten

bark is used to make objects of great value in the region. The *roussette* is considered an important animal as it comes out at nightfall, a transitional moment between the world of the living and that of the ancestors. Its red-colored hair is used in the making of precious Kanak artworks. Also, various raw materials used in the production of traditional Kanak coins come from the marine world, understood to be the realm of the ancestors in Kanak society.

The shape of a Kanak coin follows a human morphology (Fig. 1). It has a head—or mouth—shaped through the braiding of vegetable fibers, whose final form evokes a face or, alternatively, through a figurative carving of wood (Fig. 3). The body—or spine—of the coin is made of a fine string of shell beads or *roussette* bones. The coin ends in a foot—also called tip or sex—which is most often a small braid of *roussette* hair, to which shells or mother-of-pearl pendants may be added. Each coin is kept in a case that may be made of beaten bark or coconut (Fig. 6). A string made of *roussette* hair and a piece of animal or human bone is used to close the case. Coin cases may also take the form of pirogue models made of hardwood or bark cloth.

Traditionally, one man is the coin making in each Kanak clan or family, crafting coins commissioned for specific ceremonial contexts. The production of the coin is divided into several stages. After a request is placed, the man collects the different materials required for its manufacturing. The various components of the coin are made separately and then assembled. The finishing touches include the polishing of the carved wooden elements, the weaving and knotting of fibers, and the dyeing of beads and the wooden figure. According to Kanak anthropologist Yves-Béalo Gony, it takes approximately four months to make a single coin.¹

Exchanges hold an important place in Kanak communities. Objects that circulate between Kanak people include nephrite adze blades—ceremonial axes made of green stone—and foodstuffs such as taro or yams. In addition to material goods, names, children, and women also circulate between families to establish alliances and relationships. Such circulations are the result of the Kanak socio-cultural system, which is based on a duality between a clan lineage linked to a territory and alliances forged with other clans through marriage and relations between men. The French colonial government, following its taking of New

Caledonia in 1853, hindered the continuation of Kanak sociopolitical practices, but this did not entirely prevent it from reproducing and enduring. The alliances formed 'paths,' to use the expression used in the Hienghène region (northeast coast of New Caledonia's Grande Terre (Fig. 2)): objects circulate through these paths, thereby irrigating relations. Exchanges are thought out over a long period of time, in order to create long-lasting relationships. Following the theoretical argument developed by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss: a gift made to a person calls for a counter-gift in return.² This logic allows social life to be maintained. What distinguishes Kanak coins from other traded objects is that exchange and circulation are not their only functions: they are specifically objects of sociability. According to anthropologist Patrice Godin, their naming as coins is erroneous, because a coin has four main functions in any given society: it is a means of circulation, it serves as a general equivalent for exchanges, it is used as a unit of account, and it can intervene as a reserve of value. This is not the case for Kanak composite objects, the so-called coins.

Composite shell coins are among the most precious objects of ancient Kanak society. There are different types according to length, color and value; black coins are the most valued and are reserved exclusively for chiefs. Various counting systems make it possible to attribute value to a coin: the fineness of the shells and the care taken in their cutting (Fig. 4), the technical skills deployed, as well as the length of the pearl thread. However, the true value of a coin is measured according to its use and means of circulation: Kanak coins are only exchanged in major ceremonial contexts. These exchanges hold such a central place in Kanak societies that they are considered part of Kanak 'custom.' For Gony, "custom is a set of values, rules, principles and rights that are structured in a hierarchical and methodical way to manage social, political and economic life."³



Fig. 3 | Kanak artist, anthropomorphic coin head. New Caledonia, before 1900
Éric Dell Erba © Collection du musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie

As objects precious and fragile by nature, Kanak coins are handled with extreme care. According to the hierarchical and gendered division of Kanak society, only certain men are authorized to handle and trade them. A marked gender division exists in the Kanak world: women have their own kind of currency, 'coin skirts,' (Fig. 5) made from bourao fiber—a variety of hibiscus from New Caledonia—and worn or rolled up on the ground to be exchanged by women among themselves during ceremonies. In contrast, coins created and handled by men are never placed directly on the ground when presented for exchange, but placed on mats made of plant fibers. The string of beads that constitutes the body of the coin may be divided during the process. Words are also exchanged at the same time to explain the circumstances of the trading that give the exchanged objects their meaning. Once the exchange is finalized, the coins materialize the circumstances of the transaction and the words spoken.

The coins concretely symbolize the relationships created through this process. The techniques of braiding and knotting used to make the coins are also symbolic of the alliances formed between individuals and families through the exchange of these objects and the events associated with them. The coin itself, through its anthropomorphic image, serves as an allegory for the evocation of the ancestor. As a result, the coin also nourishes contacts between the world of the living and that of the dead, and functions as a symbol of life. Outside the ceremonial context, the coins are kept in the so-called 'basket of wealth,' a basket that gathers all the precious goods of a family—pieces of beaten bark cloth, nephrite blades and necklaces, coin skirts, animal bones associated with the ancestors, among others. One mother currency remains in the basket at all times to attract all the others. Symbolically, the mother currency brings wealth and future relationships to the family. In this manner, the coins are circulated both in time and space.

During the 20th century, with the rise in the use of European paper money—Pacific francs in the Caledonian archipelago—shell coins were replaced by other objects for exchange, including tobacco, cigarette packs, and banknotes. Fiber mats have also been supplanted by printed and manufactured fabrics, often made in China. While the objects being traded within Kanak society have changed, the gestures, words and their significance remain relevant. Even today, during important events, objects are exchanged to mark the relationships created between individuals and their ancestors. This is the case during ceremonies in Kanak customary circles but also more broadly in New Caledonian institutions, which today recognize the value of Kanak traditional exchanging practices for sealing agreements and establishing relationships.

From the 1980s onwards, in parallel with the development of modern cultural and identity claims, Kanak communities have gradually reappropriated certain techniques and elements of their ancient material culture. Composite coins are among the objects whose manufacture is being resumed, with a renewed interest among the younger generations. Contrary to what had occurred in the past, women are now making coins. The materials used in the production of Kanak coins still include components of animal and vegetable origin, in addition to new, industrial materials such as plastic. These new Kanak coins continue to be used for customary exchanges, but they can also be sold with their value set in Pacific francs. Interestingly, coins manufactured by women are the ones most economically valued when sold.



WHERE TO SEE KANAK COINS?

Due to a complex history of colonization, scientific missions, and collections, some of the most important Kanak objects can now be found in mainland France and Switzerland. For example Pastor and ethnologist Maurice Leenhardt was responsible for bringing many Kanak coins to public museum collections in Switzerland and in France. Living in the Houaïlou region on the east coast of New Caledonia where he founded the missionary center Do Néva—‘the true country’ in the Ajie language, one of the twenty-eight Kanak languages—he was in constant contact with the surrounding Kanak communities from which he obtained numerous objects through exchange and purchase. Kanak coins in this context symbolize the encounters between the Kanak and European worlds, as well as the development of multiple relationships—commercial, missionary, colonial—of friendly or violent nature. The materiality of Kanak coins reflects these relationships,

with some coins incorporating pieces of European cloth, wool, and other materials exogenous to New Caledonia. The presence of such objects in museum collections today is a testimony to past encounters.

Kanak coins have also played an important role in the history of exhibitions and cultural heritage in New Caledonia. In 1990, Roger Boulay and Emmanuel Kasarhérou curated the exhibition “De jade et de nacre”, a major temporary show exhibited in Nouméa, at the Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie, and later on in Paris, at the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie. In Nouméa, this exhibition was a groundbreaking event which gave rise to a customary inauguration of the Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie by representatives of Kanak authority through exchanges of gifts that “marked the reception and protection of the objects on display.”⁴ On this occasion, coins were exchanged between museum representatives, curators, and Kanak representatives.



Fig. 4 | Joseph Pei, white coin, 1994
New Caledonia
 Éric Dell Erba © Collection du musée de
 Nouvelle-Calédonie

The exhibition also allowed Kanak communities to rediscover certain types of objects that are now absent from collections in New Caledonia. Elders, who are respected individuals and knowledge holders in the Kanak world, were invited to visit the exhibition, and found the coins particularly interesting. Their encounter with these objects had an impact on the way they were presented afterwards, as Boulay testified:

“In Paris, for example, some of the old Kanak traditional chiefs, who had been invited by the government, showed a very different kind of physical behavior in front of the coin display. I personally did not realize how emotionally charged these coins could be, and I told myself that I should not have presented them in this way. The same thing happened in Nouméa: up until that point, the Museum had presented Kanak coins suspended, because it is a string of shells, very beautiful and very fine. But this is completely incorrect, one never presents

a [Kanak] coin like that! And so we redid this presentation by creating something darker, more sacred, where the coins are as they should be, that is, spread out on the ground.”⁵

Following this experience, the curators of the exhibition understood the value of these objects for contemporary Kanak societies. One of the coins on display—now housed at the Musée d’Ethnographie de Neuchâtel in Switzerland—had been given to Pastor Leenhardt by the Misikoéo (Miyikwéö) clan, established on the northeast coast of New Caledonia. Curator Kasarhérou is himself a descendant of this clan. Prior to the exhibition “De jade et de nacre,” as director of the Musée Territorial de Nouvelle-Calédonie and accompanied by his assistant Gony, Kasarhérou visited the Misikoéo clan to announce the temporary return of this object to Kanak land for the show. He was concerned that Misikoéo elders would want to keep the coin and oppose its return to the Musée d’Ethnographie de Neuchâtel



once the exhibition was over. However, the reaction of the elders was more favorable than Kasarhérou had feared:

“As for the coin that belonged to my clan, the old man said, “I am glad to see this object, but it was probably given under special conditions. What has been knotted at some point by speech cannot be unknotted if one does not know the vocabulary and syntax, which was the case. We did not know how this object had left. So it must remain [in the collection of the Musée d’Ethnographie de Neuchâtel].”⁶

The elder’s words, as recounted by Kasarhérou, once again emphasize the importance of speech, gestures, and other intangible elements exchanged at the same time as the coins and which give them their full meaning. When these immaterial components of Kanak customary exchanges are not recorded by collectors or institutions within the museum, a whole aspect of the history of Kanak coins disappears. The Misikoéo coin thus might be understood as the ‘first ambassador object,’ as an object representing the Kanak communities in Switzerland with all the relations that it materializes.⁷ The connection between this coin and Pastor Leenhardt adds to the importance of the coin, as the Pastor remains an essential figure for the generations who knew him. The coin is now on display in the “Embassies” section of the Musée d’Ethnographie de Neuchâtel accompanied by the voice of Kasarhérou telling the history of this coin.

Today Kanak currencies are still used to forge links between communities and nations. Contemporary Kanak coins are part of the collections of institutions in New Caledonia and France, most of which were acquired during exchange ceremonies held at special events such as exhibition openings. The Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural

Center in Nouméa has a large collection of objects from such ceremonies. This is also the case of two contemporary Kanak coins kept at the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, which were donated by the Customary Senate of New Caledonia during the opening of the exhibition “Kanak, l’art est une parole,” organized in 2013-2014. These two coins are part of a set that also includes three pieces of cotton canvas and a mat. A ceremony of gift exchange between the Kanak customary representatives and the representatives of the Parisian museum took place on the evening of the inauguration to affirm the relations between the various partners who contributed to organizing this exhibition.

Symbols of numerous relationships, Kanak coins have created and continue to create links between different actors: manufacturers, users, but also their European collectors and the museums that house them today. As anthropologist Amélie Roussillon points out, Kanak coins are ultimately at the “convergence of multiple paths.”⁸

Marion Bertin

Fig. 5 | Kanak artist, coin skirt. New Caledonia, before 1986
Éric Dell Erba © Collection du musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie

ENDNOTES

- 1 Y.-B. Gony, 2006: *Thewe men jilā. La monnaie kanak en Nouvelle-Calédonie*. Éditions Expressions, Nouméa.
- 2 M. Mauss, 1995: "Essai sur le don." In *Anthropologie et Sociologie*. Presses universitaires de France, Paris, p. 143-279.
- 3 Y.-B. Gony, *ibid*, p. 146.
- 4 M. Bertin, 2020: "La statuette ambassadrice. Diplomatie kanak au musée du quai Branly." *Terrain* 73, p. 228-235.
- 5 R. Boulay et M.-O. Gonseth, 1998: "L'Expérience Vanuatu." *Tsantsa* 3, p. 48.
- 6 E. Kasarhérou, 2016: "Table-ronde "Dialogue des cultures et circulations des œuvres", Un musée à imaginer." *Les Actes de colloque*, 2016.
- 7 J. Cerutti, 2016-2017: "Objets et savoirs en mouvement en Nouvelle-Calédonie : histoires et politiques d'un patrimoine partagé." *Thesis* 17, p. 69-92.
- 8 A. Roussillon, 2015: *Thewe, thawe, adi, miē... : étude des monnaies de perle kanak dans les collections du musée du quai Branly*. Mémoire d'étude, École du Louvre, Paris, p. 8.



Fig. 6 | Kanak artist, coin case. New Caledonia, c. 1900
Éric Dell Erba © Collection du musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie



NIKORIMA

Isaiah Karaitiana

Masterfully combining studded textures with smooth surfaces and warm wood with glistening inlays, the works of artist Isaiah Karaitiana, Nikorima, seem to move organically under the shifting natural light. Inspired by his late Māori grandfather named Nikorima, Karaitiana only recently began his creative journey into wood carving. Confronted with the fact that his family was losing its ancestral practices and indigenous language, Karaitiana felt the need to learn about his Māori heritage and reintroduce the traditional ways to his kin.

Wood carving provided Karaitiana with an ideal avenue to reconnect with his culture and history. He received training at Te ānanga hakaio Rakau o Aotearoa, the National Carving School in New Zealand reserved for men of Māori

descent. The school, which belongs to the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute, was founded in 1963 and provides instruction in wood carving as well as greenstone sculpting and weaving to a select number of Māori students. After decades of racism, exclusion, and land theft in the country, this institution is now a flourishing center for the younger Māori generation to learn about *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge).

Having now completed his degree, Karaitiana endeavors to become a digital ambassador for Māori—and more broadly Polynesian—art, language, and culture. He certainly carries his grandfather's traditions and *mātauranga* with honor.

Louise Deglin

Nikorima by Isaiah Karaitiana
Facebook | Nikorima New Zealand Indigenous Creative Arts
Instagram | nikorima_nzica

















PERSPECTIVE

This is not a sculpture

displaying Indian religious figures in museums



The collection of medieval Indian works at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York includes a captivating figure of a celestial dancer, or *devata*, who seems entirely freed from the heavy, inanimate material in which she was carved—so lively is her movement and strong her expression (Fig. 1). Although this *devata* has been traditionally identified as a sculpture, it would be more accurate to consider it an architectural fragment; this is also the case of all other examples of what “Western” museums value as statuary from the early medieval Indian period (7th-13th centuries).



The West is to be understood here as a system of values and practices that are shared, internationally, by a majority of museum and art professionals. Indeed, many countries outside Europe and North America—the regions which are usually conceived to be the epitome of Western ideology—use Western tools and concepts in art history. Hence many of the arguments in this case study could be applied to museums in South Asia, as they abide by similar codes to those of traditional Western art museums located in Europe or North America.

But here, it is also a geographical West that we must grapple with, insofar as I focus on museums which public mainly consists of people of European descent. Such a public is not likely to have the necessary references to understand the Indian religious representations that they see on display, and less able to understand

the rupture from their original context generated by the museum, where artworks take on an almost purely visual dimension.

THE ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENT

Indian high reliefs carved in stone representing gods, guardians, couples of lovers, or celestial dancers dating from the medieval period were never meant to be isolated as they are displayed in museums today. All belonged to a coherent whole: the temple, whether Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist (Fig. 2). Each of these figures constituted an indispensable part of a larger architectural device and occupied a well-defined place within the structure according to its iconography.

In an Indian temple, a sculpted figure is not necessarily available to the worshiper for face-to-face viewing as it is in a museum.

It may be placed high up or be undistinguishable from the dark interior of the sanctuary; if used for rituals, it can also be covered with a thick colored paste that completely transforms its appearance. Additionally, the figure is not considered an inanimate object but a living entity, whose presence is sometimes even more important than its visibility.

Few museums, in Europe or elsewhere, provide even a fleeting glimpse of the original context of these temple fragments. A notable exception is the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where a striking display gives its visitors a sense of a temple, making the primary function of the works more explicit (Fig. 3). Without being as immersive, the spaces at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York make an effort to contextualize Indian works: moldings on the lower part of the walls recall temple bases, massive pillars between the display cases imitate Indian originals, and latticed screens visually transport the visitor to the palaces and mausolea of Northern India, such as the Taj Mahal. For all that, the immediate environment of the celestial dancer mentioned above remains very pure, it being simply contextualized through the explanatory text that accompanies it.

What would we learn from this *devata* if it was displayed differently? To start with, viewers would be able to appreciate that, despite its great wealth of detail, the exhibited *devata* is only a secondary figure in the hierarchy of the temple, a minor deity without an identity of its own. Additionally, they would be able to recognize that it occupied a well-defined space on a wall or pillar devoted to this specific type of iconography. Furthermore, it would be clearer that the figure did not stand on its own, but that it interacted with many others

in the form of horned lions, ascetics, divine couples, and royal groups busy with worldly activities. Finally, museum visitors would learn that the very sensual treatment of her body, with its abstract volumes and bold pose, allowed her to remain legible within this visual abundance while participating in the larger overall effect of the temple ornamentation, which richness was to be grasped in its totality rather than in the individuality of its components.

One can go further and suggest that certain Indian medieval carved works are architecture in and of themselves (Fig. 4). Such is the case of monumental sculptures used for devotion in which a spiritual master or a god in a majestic attitude—Vishnu in this example—occupies the center of an architectural composition. Richly decorated pilasters and a base with multiple projections imitate the appearance of sanctuary doors that lead the believer to the deity worshiped in said temple. Assistants, wives, and avatars of Vishnu are organized around him in a hierarchical assembly, reminiscent of the way in which the guardian and purifying deities decorate, again, the doors of a shrine. But on this type of sculpture, the body of the god stands out forcefully from the architectural frame which is not able to contain it. The presence of the god emanates from the architectural composition just as it is supposed to emanate from a temple. The various protagonists surrounding Vishnu reflect the diversity of the world that he, as the supreme and creative god, created. This representation gives life to an entire microcosm filled with the presence of the god, supporting the role of the temple and its abundant figurative decoration.

Fig. 1 | Celestial dancer, fragment of architectural setting
Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh, mid-11th century
© Metropolitan Museum of Art





THE MASTERPIECE

Religious figures from South Asia are now part of the collections of major European and North American museums, whether they are institutions devoted entirely to Asian arts or not. These figures are most often monumental works in stone, which iconography and mode of representation are particularly compelling. The fascinating way in which their body is rendered partly explains why, in collections of Indian art, there are relatively few abstract or aniconic artworks, such as *linga*—symbolic and phallic manifestations of the Hindu god Shiva—or *buddhapada*—plaques where the footprints of the Buddha are represented. In short, it is not only deities and heroes that are exhibited in Western museums, but also the “Indian body,” in its most accomplished artistic manifestation.

Following a Western approach, museums value these figures as independent elements that were once part of a larger architectural setting because of their aesthetic potential. Thus, the display of the celestial dancer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art intends to leave no doubt as to the figure's physical qualities. Isolated on an independent pedestal, placed at eye level, dancing under a studied light, the goddess appears deliberately in suspension in this “non-place” that is the museum space. As such, the museum's ambition is not to recreate the way this *devata* was perceived in her original context, but rather to orchestrate a visual experience in which her body is staged as a standalone masterpiece.

Museums rely heavily on the notion of art as a Western concept. This can be manifested in institutions' desire to preserve artworks at any cost, attempting to freeze them in a state that defies time to ensure their transmission to future generations.

**Fig. 2 | Lakshmana temple, outer wall of the antechamber
Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, mid-10th century
© Louise Deglin**

In contrast, a medieval stone carving still in place in its original architectural setting in India today is not subject to the same imperative: a damaged figure may be repaired with a great deal of stucco, while a broken devotional statue may simply be thrown away, having become unfit to host the deity it represents. In contrast, the decontextualization entailed by the museum makes us forget that these religious representations are still used for worship in India today no matter how old they are.

The museum setting highlights the artistic value of works but strips them of their function. In permanent collections, Indian sculpted fragments are often organized according to European art historical categories following their chronology and geographic origin: they are aligned independently along walls, because they all are self-sufficient by reason of being masterpieces; they are grouped without distinction of function or religious affiliation and illuminated in the same way as they are all considered equal in their status of exceptional aesthetic achievement.

UNIVERSAL ART

Prior to the 20th century, Indian religious works were less collected by Europeans than other local productions, including manuscripts, secular paintings, or objects taken from royal treasures, for example the jewelry of sovereigns defeated by colonial forces. The representation of a deity, the beating heart of a shrine in India, was first and foremost an “idol” to the Western eye. This was particularly the case with Hindu figures, whose fantastic and hybrid anatomies—eight-armed or elephant-headed deities—immediately provoked rejection in the West, turning them into “Much Maligned Monsters,” to use the evocative title of a book by Partha Mitter.¹

The status of Indian religious works in the West did not change significantly until

the early 20th century, when international defenders of Indian art gradually built their case. The research conducted by renowned art historians such as Ananda Coomaraswamy or Stella Kramrisch greatly contributed to this shift by proposing a mystical reading of Indian imagery, freed from comparison against ideals of Western visual culture, such as the athletic physiognomies of ancient Greek statuary. The representation of the Indian body, by its abstraction and protean nature, came to be considered the physical expression of higher spiritual concepts.

As a result, museums in Europe and North America began to fill the gaps in their South Asian art departments at the same time as colonial grip in India was loosening. An art market was established for which local intermediaries facilitated the acquisition of “spare parts” of temples by Westerners. Hence, even if the visual interest in religious representations took some time to develop, it is nevertheless impossible to deny the correlation that exists between colonization and the development of Indian art collections outside of India. For example, France did not give up its last Indian stronghold on the southeast coast of India, Pondicherry, until 1954, seven years after India and Pakistan had declared their independence. It is thus no coincidence that the strong suit of the Indian gallery of the National Museum of Asian Arts – Guimet in Paris is the art of Southern India.² In parallel, Indian religious figures that had been acquired previously and were until then exhibited in ethnographic collections in Europe and North America were transferred to fine arts museums.

The new, supposedly global, approach to art that emerged in the mid-20th century was meant to be inclusive, but it did exclude other ways of seeing, thinking about, and interacting with artworks.³



Despite exhibition designs being similar today for European, Asian, African, Oceanic, and American artworks—which can perhaps be seen as a sign of the acceptance of non-European art into a universal notion of art history—the treatment of non-European art is rather different to the advantage of Antique collections, mainly Greco-Roman, Near-Eastern, and Egyptian. The staging of the Parthenon marbles at the British Museum in London, the winged bulls of Khorsabad at the Louvre Museum in Paris and the reconstruction of the Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are striking examples. Sculpted figures from the ancient Mediterranean and Near East often have an eloquent display and are accompanied by models

and drawings to evoke the structures which they used to adorn, a privilege that is not granted to collections of South Asian origin.

If lacking this supporting interpretative material, to what extent is it possible to contextualize medieval Indian artworks in museums? The answer is likely to vary according to whether an institution is based in Europe or North America, both continents having diverging approaches and traditions on the matter. In the European system, which is generally secular and integrative, South Asian communities are less involved in the world of museums—one exception being the United Kingdom. Also, museums are generally publicly funded, placing less emphasis on private donations.

Fig. 3 | Display of Indian architectural fragments
Philadelphia Art Museum, Philadelphia.
© Louise Deglin



Fig. 4 | Vishnu, devotional figure, Punjab, 10th-11th century
© Metropolitan Museum of Art

In contrast, in the North American system, which is often seen as a melting pot, multiple diasporas live side by side while maintaining a certain cultural autonomy. South Asian communities are much more involved with museums in the U.S. and Canada, if only from a financial point of view, in the purchase of works or the organization of events such as symposia or exhibitions. People of South Asian descent are overall more represented in the academic and museum field in the U.S. and Canada than in Europe. In consequence, in their desire to be unifying spaces within a resolutely cosmopolitan society, North American museums have a more complex relationship to questions of religious identity, which is not without influencing the way Indian works are exhibited.

CROSSED VIEWS

The analogy is common: the museum is a temple dedicated to the arts and knowledge. This understanding is reflected in the very etymology of the word: *museion* designating in ancient Greek a sanctuary dedicated to the Muses, the deities of the arts. The metaphor makes sense, especially when one looks at the exterior of 19th-century museums built in a neoclassical vein. From the British Museum in London to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, they have all the markings of a Greek temple, with their colonnades and large triangular pediments.

Nevertheless, these artistic temples housing Indian collections, with their sterile interiors and silent atmosphere, fail to recreate the ambiance of the sanctuaries from which the works originate. It is true that one does not visit a museum as they go to an Indian temple. Within the space of the museum, the visitor delights in the the formal beauty of the exhibited objects perceived as inanimate in a silence that is nevertheless described as “religious,” even if in this context, the religiosity is much less sensual than that which is at work in an actual temple. While the focus of the

museum exhibit is for the visitor to appreciate the lines of the body and the iconography of medieval Indian stone carvings, this is not the case in Indian temples where figures are easily hidden from view under layers of paste, colored clothes, and garlands of flowers (Fig. 5 and 6).

If comparing art museums to Indian temples has limitations, comparing the public of both settings might prove fruitful in that it allows us to understand that the temple and the museum are both, in their own way, consecrated spaces. Within both the religious and the artistic temple, visitors travel to pay homage to the divine or artistic genius, and parallel dynamics are created while others intersect in unexpected ways. For instance, as exams approach, students at the École du Louvre in Paris, mostly Westerners, engage in a ritual mimicking Hindu devotees offering sweets to effigies of the god of wisdom Ganesha exhibited at the National Museum of Asian Arts - Guimet.

Globalization and the diversification of museum audiences are forcing us to consider the museum experience and its relationship with the temple experience. One may think that the context and the audience of an Indian religious work are necessarily different depending on whether it is located in a temple or a museum. However, I suggest that focusing on what unites the perspective of the believer to that of the visitor rather than on what distinguishes them might be a more productive approach. Obviously, the devotional figures remain haloed with respect even behind display cases, according to what art historian Svetlana Alpers has coined “the museum effect,”⁴ Both the believer and the visitor would like to take a portion of what they have seen back with them, whether from the temple or the museum. Hence, the worshipper can purchase prints representing the deity of the sanctuary in stalls in the outskirts of the sacred complex, while the museum-goers will rely on the museum store to obtain postcards of similar religious effigies, this time isolated in a museum-like austerity.





Fig. 5 | Nageshvara temple in Kumbakonam
Tamil Nadu, late 9th-early 10th century
© Johan Levillain

Aesthetic appreciation is often the major argument used by scholars to justify the opposition between the temple and the museum experience. Supposedly, a believer would not be sensitive to it, as the presence of the sacred in a sculpted effigy would supersede its artistic quality. I consider this to be an exaggeration, as the beauty of the devotional figure does not escape the eye of the believer who honors the divinity, even if that aesthetic appreciation might not be an end in itself. When they set out towards the temple or the museum, worshipers and museum-goers are pushed by a comparable desire to see. Although it might seem obvious in the case of museum visitors, it should not be forgotten that the gaze is at the heart of the devotional machinery in India. Both in a temple as in a museum, one comes to see and to experience the presence of the sacred, whether mystical or physical.

It would certainly be naive if I thought that such a parallel could justify the presence of Indian art in Western museums. Instigating more religiosity into the museum experience or creating replicas of Indian temples within exhibition spaces will not suffice, as the museum visit and that to the temple retain their own specificities, thereby generating inevitable tensions. Hence, a well-informed Western audience may feel an almost egotistical satisfaction in getting to behold masterpieces in a museum space while readily admitting that the architectural fragments they contemplate would have more meaning in their original setting. Moving forward, the challenge for art and museum professionals will therefore not be to resolve these tensions but rather to contextualize Indian devotional figures for the public as they cannot be fully understood through the isolated aesthetic experience of the museum. It is only in this way that different views, perspectives, and approaches to these sculpted fragments will merge, as much as possible, towards an unprecedented convergence.

Johan Levillain

ENDNOTES

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Fig. 6 | Jain divinity, Tirumalai temple, Tamil Nadu
© Johan Levillain





PICHINKU

Naturally Dyed Andean Yarn



Fibers in a *chilca* dye bath
Previous page: *kinsa kuchu* dyed alpaca
© Diego Del Rio | Pichinku Fibers

Nestled in the heart of the Urubamba Valley—also known as the Sacred Valley—outside of the city of Cusco (Peru), Pichinku is a grassroots project that brings together ancestral knowledge, specialized artisanal skills, and local biodiversity to create naturally dyed yarns. This successful venture relies on the work of devoted specialists Santusa Mamani Huallpa, Angela Milo Huallpa, and Ubaldina Laime Mamani under the leadership of Dana Blair, a determined woman from the U.S. who decided to take action to bring support and recognition to the world of Andean textile-making.

Pichinku, meaning “little bird” in Quechua—one of the most widely spoken Indigenous languages in the Andes and known to have been used already by the Incas—was born five years ago out of a wild but well-founded dream. Dana, having completed an undergraduate degree in anthropology, moved to Peru to work for Threads of Peru, a not-for-profit social enterprise supporting Andean weaving communities. A year-long position turned into a four-year experience, and instilled in Dana a love for the slow-paced, nature-oriented lifestyle of the Andean highland communities, and a dedication to hand-made textiles.

While Dana’s experience at Threads of Peru was very enriching, it also shed light on some of the critical issues that dominate the field of traditional Andean weaving. Contrarily to fast fashion, Andean textiles are made through a complex and time-consuming process which consists of gathering of fibers, usually cotton grown on the coast or alpaca wool from the highlands; their cleaning; dyeing with plants, wood, or insects; spinning; twisting; and, finally, weaving—all entirely by hand. The making of a single Andean piece thus requires several weeks, if not months of work depending on size and design, resulting in end-products that are both necessarily expensive and variable in their appearance. For this reason, Andean textiles produced following traditional methods are currently only sought after by a niche group of enthusiasts and do not provide a reliable source of income for many weavers.

Faced with this situation, Dana wanted to find a way to reach a broader consumer base that could provide stable employment for Andean women whose knowledge and skills, albeit critical and extensive, are not valued in the modern job market. Focusing on one component of textile-making—the dyed yarn—rather than fully finished weavings proved to be the solution for Dana. Naturally dyed fibers have allowed Pichinku to reach a wide community of knitters, designers, and fashion enthusiasts around the globe who, subsequently, have gained access to a high-quality base product for their own works.

Pichinku reconciles the social nature of not-for-profit organizations with a more financially viable model for Andean textile specialists. For Dana, this was “a medium for the change I have always wanted to make.” Pichinku is indeed much more than a business: it is a communal and environmentally friendly initiative that supports the preservation of artisanal traditions. But the road has not always been easy for Angela, Santusa, Ubaldina, and Dana, as the business is very much a project built from the ground-up through trial and error. Many did not think that Pichinku was a good business idea. They might not still. But friends and family believed in Dana, who has made it happen and will keep it going. What bolstered her confidence was the success of her Kickstarter campaign, which achieved its fundraising goals in a mere twelve days. Seeing the market and the community respond so positively to the project convinced Dana to launch it.





Baby alpaca with *chapi* dye
© Diego Del Rio | Pichinku Fibers

Many hurdles have had to be overcome since, but these hardships have only strengthened Pichinku's vision as a people- and place-centered project. First, the premises of Pichinku had to be located at the heart of the Sacred Valley, an hour away from the city of Cusco, where the expert dyers live and the wild dye plants grow. This meant that the company would be necessarily more geographically isolated and restricted in terms of resources than if based in a larger city like Cusco or Lima. Second, there was no official "instructions manual" for making natural dyes in the Andes, as the practice is transmitted orally and relies on hands-on experience. Everyone at the Pichinku workshop thus had to bring their varied knowledge to the table to experiment and practice to gain a wider understanding of the processes to follow to dye the yarn. And third, finding the yarn material to treat and dye was another major challenge for Pichinku. After much research, they have chosen to work with a yarn supplier based in Arequipa, in southern Peru, which provides natural yarn with traceable provenance from South America and which is processed in Peru in sufficient quantities to supply Pichinku's demands at a reasonable rate. Although higher-quality sheep's wool, well known and very popular in modern craft, is mainly imported from Argentina or Uruguay, Pichinku is now moving towards working only with fibers of Peruvian origin.

Once past these obstacles, Pichinku could start developing its own catalog. The current line of product is broad, but the base remains unchanged. "Everything comes to us as white, and we provide the dye service. This is not only for our own line of yarn, but third-party companies also send us their fibers or clothes to be dyed at Pichinku," explains Dana. "We also make finished garments like backstrap loom weavings. We work with a wide range of products that keeps everyone at Pichinku busy. It's only the four of us and there is never enough time in the day to get everything done."

While the company could use a few extra hands, scaling up is hardly an option in an operation for which care and patience are essential. Andean dyeing is an artisanal process, and at Pichinku, it is done in large cooking pots on stoves. Currently, the yarn is dyed in one-kilogram lots, which is the maximum that can be done to guarantee an environmentally-friendly, high-quality product. Ratio of dye plants to yarns or garments can be as much as one to one, meaning that one kilogram of dye plants is needed to dye a kilogram of fiber. Increasing the production of dyed yarns would thus have a greater negative impact on the environment given the large quantity of dye material and dye plants that would be needed for lots of five or ten kilograms of fiber. For these reasons, Pichinku intends to remain artisanal in its methods and scale.

Natural dyes are seasonal and weather-dependent. A process that encourages "appreciating and celebrating variation, which I think is a much healthier approach than to expect constancy and uniformity," confesses Dana. During the rainy season, which occurs in the Andes from November to March, products do not dry as quickly, which makes the process a bit more laborious. Hence, the first months of the calendar year are usually dedicated to sampling, discussions with clients, and overall rest after intense months of work. By the end of March or the beginning of April, the dye plants are ready for harvest. This is also the time when roads dry up, becoming more reliable, thus making travel to the gathering locations safe again. Being dependent on nature's timeline, the employees at Pichinku do not produce at the same pace year-round and have had to learn to "take breaks and work with seasonal availability, which is overall more sustainable." This requires communicating ahead of time with clients regarding the readiness of products which will vary throughout the year. Open communication and education about the making process is essential to build informed expectations among clients.



Ubaldina (front) and Santusa (back) working with fresh *molle* leaves
© Diego Del Rio | Pichinku Fibers



Th'iri flowers

© Diego Del Rio | Pichinku Fibers

Although some dyestuffs must be harvested and worked with while fresh, others such as cochineal or *chapi* (a relative of European madder) can be dried and used any time, thus allowing greater flexibility. Even in these cases, weather conditions may affect the dyeing process. For cochineal in particular, “we found that moisture and cold conditions can cause the color to change when drying,” says Dana. Through experiments, a larger number of dye plant combinations can be found. For example, the women of Pichinku realized that it is possible to boil the fruit and the leaves of the black walnut in advance. The saved dye water changes color over time, turning into a rich golden brown after a week. But even in these cases, restraint is key. Harvesting plants to be dried still requires parsimony, and the Pichinku staff picks one by one the plants that they need exactly, nothing more. These conditions make the essence of natural dyeing: there is never any guarantee, and some years, certain plants will simply not be available in sufficient quantities. “Inconsistency is part of the natural process,” Dana reminds us.

In addition to providing high-quality and sustainable yarns dyed in mesmerizing colors, Pichinku aims at highlighting the value in traditional Andean techniques and showcasing their benefits to local populations who have been long discouraged from continuing their ancestral practices. To that end, Dana, Angela, Santusa, and Ubaldina organize workshops for community groups to come and observe life at Pichinku. The event creates a time to share stories and experiences. The visitors bring potatoes that will be cooked and eaten together during the gathering as a sign of exchange and reciprocity. For Dana,

these workshops are helpful in showing the potential of traditional methods: “artisans see what we have been able to do with something that they might have already discarded. These ancestral techniques have brought stable employment to local women and beautiful products to makers around the world.”

When asked about the future, the founder shares that Pichinku still has room to grow and expand. The company could benefit from a larger staff, which in turn would constitute an excellent opportunity for more locals to gain access to steady employment. If this was already the case years ago, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry in Peru has made even more evident the critical need for reliable sources of income in the region outside tourism. As the company celebrates its five-year anniversary, we are reminded that Pichinku is much more than a business. It is a community project and a catalyst for growth and hope. Pichinku means dyeing yarns amidst children, animals, cross-callings, and conversations combining Spanish, Quechua, and English. Pichinku is an invitation to return to a mindful way of life following seasonal cycles, purposeful hard work, and to sustainable products made ethically.

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Ubalдина (left) and Santusa (right) drying dyed fibers
© Diego Del Rio | Pichinku Fibers



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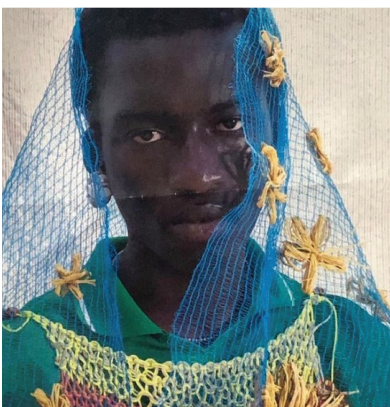


An African journal and project

With its mix of black and white studio shots, vintage color analog prints, movie stills, and recordings, *wā dé* is a visual archive of Sub-saharan Africa that comes to life before our eyes. Not a filtered showcase of culture, fashion, art, or lifestyle, but an impromptu and genuine mix which vibrates with energy. There is something impenetrable about this journal and the connections it traces, which may have to do with the project's intimate relationship to memory, both personal and collective. On *wā dé*'s feed, family recipes and photographs are exhibited next to studio portraits and scenes of everyday life from the city or the village.

Esther Hien, the face behind the project, describes *wā dé* as “two words in Birifor, a language from the South-West region of Burkina-Faso, a small enclaved country in West-Africa. This expression is an invitation to someone to come and take “something.” Behind, there is this idea of a gift.” A gift that one cannot fully name, but a gift full of emotions, sometimes contradictory. A gift that is both material and intangible, unique and shared. One that we will keep on taking, as long as we are allowed.

Louise Deglin



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As women of primarily White ancestry who grew up in Europe, we acknowledge our position of privilege as well as exteriority to the topics and traditions that we want Convergence to showcase. Being raised in a culture where colonialism is presented as a distant and vague memory to forget, we strive to challenge this narrative and instead to engage in sometimes difficult or uncomfortable conversations, to amplify voices which have long been muffled, and to spread knowledge and perspectives widely. Rather than simply to make amends or share our passion, Convergence is for us a way to put our skills and privilege to use, to hopefully contribute to change, in a process of reparation and reconstruction.

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